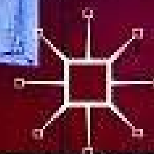
HOLLYWOOD'S REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SINO-TIBETAN CONFLICT

Politics, Culture, and Globalization

Jenny George Daccache
and Brandon Valeriano



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To my sister Julie

I am grateful to you for showing a strong commitment to this project, walking me through the writing process, offering moral support, and providing all possible help to get the book accomplished.

J. G. D.

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Preface

During a film studies program I was enrolled in years ago, the students were assigned a research project related to the course of *Propaganda through Film History*. As I was searching for a challenging subject to work on I accidentally found an article about the movie *Seven Years in Tibet* that triggered my attention. The movie is my favorite, and I saw it several times. I was for a long time fascinated by the beauty the movie exposes and the way it engages the viewer with the breathtaking natural sites of the Tibetan landscape. The divine power embracing the Argentine Andes (standing in for the Himalayas in the movie) resembles to a great degree the divinity that resides in the Lebanese mountains. Moreover, I was always attracted to Buddhism for what that religion presents as human spiritual development to reach a state of enlightenment and perfectionism. In point of fact, Buddhism is similar to Christianity (the religion I belong to), as both are centered on absolute compassion and love. Every time I watch this movie I feel a great sympathy toward the Tibetans in their struggle to maintain a sort of autonomy and preserve their great and unique culture.

Even with my great compassion for the Tibetans, *Seven Years in Tibet* raised in my mind some serious questions on the depiction of historical events that did not match with my grandiose view of China as one of the oldest civilizations in history and a rising global power at present. My fascination with China grew during its hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games. We daily followed this event in Lebanon, and the opening ceremony combining the power, arts, and beauty of China in some of the most captivating spectacles captured my mind for many days. What impressed me most were the words "One World, One Dream" that China announced as its official slogan for the 2008 Olympic Games. These four words symbolize the new China and recapitulate the hope of people all over the world of a better future for humankind as China enters the third millennium as a global power with a peace message.

The study about *Seven Years in Tibet* developed from several pages to a book. Many would ask why a Lebanese scholar would be interested in studying a case related to American film industry and a conflict taking place on the other side of the globe. I would simply answer that I grew up watching Hollywood movies and that, while China and Tibet are geographically remote regions, I am connected to Tibet emotionally and to China rationalistically.

Brandon and I share the same motives in writing an academic book related to movies. As Brandon explains,

> Growing up I found the American education system lacking. Early on, school seemed unable to really keep my interest. I had so many questions and ideas that needed nourishment but found few answers. Movies were my path away from this form of intellectual starvation. One can only read so much during a day. Films were a form of investigation and education that was not nerdy or

isolated. Film is a social form of intelligent communication. Once scoffed at as trite and for the masses, film is now a respected form of study and an exceptional method of communicating lessons.

I have always been interested in Asian politics, my intention in graduate school was to study Chinese political systems, but other events and forms of study became important to me. Later in life I have returned to study and analyze the region with a new perspective, the pedagogical perspective from film. Film is a teaching tool that has untapped potential in the modern era. Our students no longer have the drive to read, but we can engage them through film. The lessons we draw, as educators, from films tend to last longer than any normal form of educational communication. It is from this lens that I have engaged this project. What can film tell us about the world? It turns out that we can analyze the entire course of recent political history through a few films. The power of the medium cannot be overlooked by academics and this book is an attempt to extend this level of pedagogical engagement to a few questions that I consider important.

The twenty-first century started with a great revolution in the communication process, bringing about a more advanced form of globalization that surpassed the space and mind boundaries. People no longer belong to their region, and they are affected by and can affect distant events. Thus the two-way flow of knowledge between the East and the West has become an urgent need to envisage unconventional analysis to global crisis. The exchange of thoughts among academics all over the world regarding a specific issue may generate some innovative approaches that otherwise would not be possible. Even though many Middle Eastern scholars rely often on Western academic sources in their research, the difference remains in using the Western knowledge according to Eastern understanding of the world.

This book is one of the few academic studies exemplifying the international knowledge exchange process, where a Middle Eastern author motivated by Hollywood movies writes in collaboration with a Western author a book about the American entertainment sector's engagement in a Far East conflict. Exploring the book's subject through a harmonious combination of two different perspectives given by two authors belonging to different cultures and different geographical surroundings has provided a wider dimension and deeper interpretation to the issue.

The book investigates Western representations of the Sino-Tibetan conflict. The focus is on how Hollywood has viewed China and Tibet since the 1930s, with a particular focus on the events of 1997 through 2009. The American film industry has a vivid history with Tibet that goes back to 1937 with the Frank Capra movie *Lost Horizon*. Conversely, it has a gloomy experience with China, which has its roots in the Yellow Peril era with the series of Fu Manchu movies. Hollywood in the 1990s became largely involved in the Sino-Tibetan conflict and brought it to the front to become a universal, long-lasting issue that symbolizes the fight between good and evil. The release of three movies condemned by China in 1997—*Red Corner*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Kundun*—represents an all-time low point for relations between Hollywood and China and quite the reverse as a high point for relations between Hollywood and the Dalai Lama.

The book shows that the line between fiction and fact is blurred in art; fiction is represented as fact and facts are represented as fiction. Therefore, films' artistic and entertainment features can serve to deliver political messages. The three remarkable movies made in 1997, at the height of global

awareness of Tibet and criticism of China, all have similar objectives. They are propaganda movies made during a crisis with the intention of influencing the international community and moving it to put pressure on the Chinese government to adopt some significant changes on human rights and its handling of the Tibet issue that better suit Tibetan culture and Western politics. The book raises questions of the effectiveness of Hollywood moviesand celebrities' traditional line in visualizing and managing the Orient, and draws attention to a more positive role that Hollywood may play in the future while being a part of the peace process in the Far East. Combining Chinese economic power, American political power, Hollywood dream-factory power, and Tibetan Buddhism's compassion provides a new dimension to the Sino-Tibetan conflict, where a peaceful resolution could be possible.

The book is dynamic and interdisciplinary in scope with different ramifications and harmonious integration of theories and concepts developed in diverse academic disciplines such as Fordism, Orientalism, mass culture, agenda setting, soft power, and issue-based approach. It studies the intersection of film, politics, propaganda, culture, and economy and explains how these factors affect each other and are affected by each other throughout history. It examines the paradoxical situation of Hollywood in the era of globalization as the American film industry, coexisting in harmony with the US democratic system, has to face the identity dilemma and many other challenges emerging out of the new state of its global belonging. The various transformations Hollywood is undergoing in modern times are largely connected to the major transformations taking place in the world at the political, economic, cultural, and communications level.

These are contemporary controversial issues that this book tries to cover through the case of the Sino-Tibetan conflict. Through this issue we can predict, explain, and analyze the scope of world political interactions. Film tells us much more than the simple story presented in the trailer. By looking at what films are produced and watched, we can analyze and predict the atmosphere within global politics. We investigate this process and examine the future of the relationship between Hollywood, China, and Tibet.

Jenny George Daccache
June 2012

Lebanon, Beirut

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Jenny is very grateful to Etienne Augé, Professor of Mass Communication, for triggering her curiosity toward film's relation to politics and propaganda and for supervising the project in its early stages. She also thanks Alex Raymond, Professor of History and Political Science, for supervising and reviewing the work at a more developed stage and for providing valuable comments and recommendations regarding the historical and political aspects. Jenny considers this book one of the major achievements in her academic career and owes this achievement to Nemer Frayha, Professor of Education and Political Science at the Lebanese University, who has held several top-ranking academic and administrative positions in private and public educational institutions in Lebanon and abroad. Frayha's strong sense of leadership, analytical thinking, extensive knowledge, and high ethical standards—along with the great attention and encouragement he offers to skillful, ambitious, and studious academics—make him a valuable asset to the higher education sector in Lebanon. Jenny credits Frayha for providing her with the incentives to explore her intellectual capacities and to grow in knowledge and depth.

Brandon is particularly thankful for the love and comfort of his dog Bella and her stepbrother Teddy. This is one of several academic books Brandon is publishing. Hopefully his long list of future books will be accomplished progressively so he can go into more detail about his intellectual debts. Academically, he would like to thank Richard Marks from Whittier College (for introducing him to Asian studies), Fred Bergerson, Neal Tate (for letting him teach international relations and film at Vanderbilt), Laura Sjoberg, Doug Van Belle, Patrick James, and John Vasquez. As Siskel and Ebert said so long ago during their movie review TV show, "the balcony is closed."

Chapter 1
Introduction

Hollywood, China, and Tibet: A Brief Overview

The central question of this book is how the West, and particularly the American film industry, perceived and dealt with China from the rise of modern sound film productions to the modern era of globalization. The process of globalization has brought about a more nuanced view of China, and the Asian world in general, to the West. How have these changes affected the ancient and negative perspectives the West has projected onto China? What perspective of Tibet does the West have, and how have views of China developed in light of the Tibet question? We explore these themes through the lens of the Hollywood system. As the Hollywood system is transformed through globalization, it must deal with both its backward perspectives of China and also its forward and progressive views regarding the situation in Tibet, colored by the goals of freedom, spirituality, and redemption in modern society.

One goal is to understand the evolving role of Hollywood in the global marketplace. What messages do Hollywood and the film industry promote, and how do these messages fit in with the ethos of democracy and capitalism inherent in the United States and the West? Is there a chance global conflicts and disagreements can be resolved through entertainment and popular culture? Or does popular culture harden negative views of certain countries through narrow lenses and outlooks? The other goal of this project is to understand how issues determine perspectives and morph sentiment.

Culture and entertainment as a factor of peace is a key issue in this book, as Hollywood's success in the global market is achieved by its willingness to be liberated from political constraints and to rise above ethnocentrism, thus becoming the axis around which cross-cultural communication between East and West could evolve.

Hollywood is at the center of the American film industry. As an entertainment business enterprise, its goal is to make financial gain by producing movies that sell and achieve success at the local and global box office. No longer can a movie be called a success if it makes money in the domestic American market; rather, success is now judged by the global marketplace, with major films often doubling the American box office take with international sales. Consequently, it is difficult to detach Hollywood from the global political, economic, and cultural issues of the time in which it operates. To be blind to the possible cultural impact of a movie will doom it to failure.

The United States has been recognized as the global hegemon since the mid-twentieth century. This

reality gives rise to an industry in Hollywood that deals with international issues from the lens of the American perspective. As such, Hollywood's approach to certain cultures, ideologies, and countries is related to its global position and ideology. The "Superman" ideal is common throughout the film industry; the goal is the promotion of peace, justice, and the American way. In relation to the view of America as superior culture, the power of film also includes the rejection of other cultures and perspectives as inferior and primitive. Hollywood movies project different historical, political, religious, and cultural facts at the local and global levels through the dimension of the "other." Hollywood falls in the trap of universalizing Western values and thus fails to grasp constructed perspectives throughout the world that might offer value and nuance. The existence of other perspectives or values is often ignored in Hollywood and much of Western culture, until very recently. Hollywood's views of human rights, political and economic systems, and social structures are framed through Western experiences.

Some critics have highlighted the issue of cultural homogeneity generated by the American media and entertainment industry as the most notable Hollywood contribution; while Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer talk about the "culture industry," Dwight MacDonald describes the mass culture that is the outcome of policy adopted by the media entertainment sector: "Like nineteenth-century capitalism, Mass Culture is a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and dissolving all cultural distinctions. It mixes and scrambles everything together, producing what might be called homogenized culture…Mass Culture breaks down the wall, integrating the masses into a debased form of High Culture and thus becoming an instrument of political domination."[1] Films based on attitudes of Western supremacy have accelerated global aggressiveness against Hollywood and the United States. As Nancy Snow, senior research fellow at the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, claims, "If Hollywood and the US were more honest brokers, if they worked toward a dialogue with global citizens, they might face less global outrage about their dominant position on the world stage."[2] Therefore, one of the major problems Hollywood has to deal with in the globalization era is its blindness to the contributions and diversity of other perspectives. The transformations Hollywood underwent since the beginning of the twenty-first century to meet with the demand of the global market remain insufficient. The process of engaging other cultures is now more fluid and balanced than in the past, but still cultural errors occur with frequency.

How Hollywood functions within the American/Western/global structure provides the framework within which we can proceed in exploring the complex topics that hold major ramifications at the political, cultural, spiritual, and economic levels. The goal is to explore how Hollywood and the idea of mass culture engage China and Tibet throughout history and in recent times. How have perspectives changed, and what impact do violence and human rights issues have on the conduct of business in Hollywood? Early film work clearly engages the Far East at a racist and superficial level, but what has changed as a result of globalization and global film market?

This analysis leads to several compelling questions: What is the impact of Hollywood's engagement with the Tibet issue? Has mass culture produced mass activism or has popular culture followed the dictates of business and cultural hegemony? The political desires of Hollywood activists have clearly led to a change in the purpose and intent of some filmmakers and major production houses. Does this awareness affect the political situation, or will the capitalist perspective of keeping markets available and pliable dominate the new global era of Hollywood? These issues remain at the heart of our analysis, and hopefully, an engagement of film and Hollywood

industry can lead us to some answers to important questions that are now being engaged by scholars, activists, policy makers, and the simple fans of movies. To discuss effectively in our study the controversial issue of the Sino-Tibetan conflict and how it is represented in Hollywood movies, a brief introduction of China, Tibet, and Hollywood is indispensable.

History and Background

China, once one of the most powerful and advanced empires in history, has managed in the globalization era to reestablish the grandeur of its past. The country is competing today with the United States to become the global hegemon in coming decades: "During the first half of the twenty-first century, it will increasingly emerge as a superpower in every sense—economically, politically, militarily, culturally, and technologically."[3] Yet these perceptions fail to anticipate the growing pains experienced by developing countries, as growth produces a new culture of capitalism, new political classes, and disaffected citizenry left out of the globalization gold rush. China will rise, but by how much, how fast, and how effectively is yet to be determined.

China, with the third-largest land area on earth, has the world's largest population, estimated to be around 1,339,724,852.[4] The People's Republic of China (PRC) recognizes 55 minority ethnic groups such as the Tibetans, Mongols, Uighurs, Zhuang, Miao, Yi, and, many others in addition to the largest group, the Han, representing 92 percent of the population.

The country has an abundant literary and cultural heritage. The four great inventions of ancient China—paper, compass, gunpowder, and printing—contributed tremendously in the progress of all humanity. For many centuries China exerted strong influence over Asia in the fields of art, culture, philosophy, technology, and written language. Ancient China, as a superior nation, behaved toward other civilizations with arrogance, perceiving outsiders as barbarians and thus inferior: "Until the sixteenth or seventeenth century, China was the most developed country in the world, surpassing Western Europe in the richness of its inventions and the refinement of its civilization."[5]

China was ruled by successive dynasties that developed bureaucratic systems enabling the emperor to directly control its vast territories.[6] In the nineteenth century, the Chinese dynasty system that had endured for two thousand years came to an end as the Qing dynasty collapsed under the pressure of internal revolutions and the Anglo-Chinese war. China, defeated by the British, became victim of a Western imperialism that tended to colonize portions of its territories through lease agreements: "Although most European leases in China were granted for 99 years, it was generally recognized at the time that the concessions really were steps toward the ultimate annexation of Chinese territories. In an expression that gained fashion at the time, the great Qing Empire indeed was being 'carved up like a melon.'"[7] In its modern history, China underwent a cycle of dramatic deterioration and dropped to its lowest level in the twentieth century, becoming "one of the world's poorest and most backward countries."[8] In 1911 the Chinese nationalists managed to overthrow the imperial regime and established the Republic of China in response to this decline and domination by Western states. After World War I, China witnessed continual disturbances that rattled the foundations of its state due to the foreign intrusions, the Japanese invasion and the civil war fought for the soul of the country. The Chinese Communist Party took power in 1949 and implemented severe measures to restore the country to its rightful place and establish order. The PRC's rigid regime closed China's doors to the outside world and imposed firm rules on citizens to achieve modernization at a pace and speed

acceptable to party leadership.

In the 1960s Mao Zedong (Tse-Tung), chairman of the Communist Party, launched the Cultural Revolution that aimed to bring major transformations to the Chinese society: “Confucian tradition, residual bourgeois materialism and capitalism were to be completely erased. These millenarian goals were never realized, but the Cultural Revolution dramatically and often painfully changed many people’s lives”[9] The revolution not only failed to achieve some improvements in the country but also had devastating effects on China at all levels. Millions of people were persecuted, tortured, abused, arrested, and forced to leave their villages while hundreds of thousands died mostly due to arbitrary executions, severe starvation, and forced migration. The number of people who fell victim to violence (persecuted, convicted, labeled, or otherwise penalized) during that period has been estimated by Hu Yaobang, general secretary of the Communist Party, to be one hundred million or one-tenth of China’s population.[10] Needless to say, the failings of the Cultural Revolutions provide sufficient material for a separate book on the topic.

The Communist Party, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, who replaced Mao’s chosen successor, Hua Guofeng, initiated in the 1970s and 1980s major reforms as means of development and progress. China proceeded with a collective modernization plan involving industry, agriculture, science, technology, and national defense. The reforms that China implemented facilitated ownership, promoted private enterprises, activated the market, and opened the country to international trade. The reforms extended to the legal and judicial system to create a more favorable environment for foreign investment. The economic liberalization policies that the Chinese government adopted led to tremendous economic growth when coupled with aggressive currency manipulation and cheap labor markets: “At the end of the nineteenth century, China was widely seen as a comic-opera state, but by the end of the twentieth was emerging as a significant world power…By the mid-1990s there was a new mood of national confidence, at home and among diaspora, and a growing belief that Greater China—a conglomerate of the PRC, Taiwan, and the overseas Chinese—would be setting the Asian, if not the world, agenda in the twenty-first century.”[11] The rigid political culture continues to be a major obstacle to economic reform. The economic progress contributed in providing a better standard of living to the Chinese, yet it failed to bring them a solid foundation for freedom. Oppression and disrespect for human rights principles continue to prevail. The West is confronted with examples of this dichotomy every day as China enters the club of major powers, but the Chinese regime fails to respect the rights and freedoms of its people in a manner consistent with Western expectations.

China’s understanding of human rights differs from that of the Western societies: “To the Chinese, the human rights to food, clothing, shelter, economic development, and security, as well as the right of individuals to live in a stable society, are paramount over traditional Western-style individual political liberties.”[12] China, according to Western standards, is an oppressor, yet “judged by [its own] standard, China in the past twenty years is a leader, not a laggard, in promoting human rights of its people.”[13] The difference in views helps explain the divergent outcomes of economic liberalization. Opportunities are increasing for the Chinese people, but these opportunities do not extend to all areas of domestic life. To expect more would be unwarranted at this point, yet the central idea remains the same—cultural perceptions in the West and the East differ on the issue of human rights.

Despite the clash in views as to what exactly the term human rights means, the issue remains a source of conflict for China as the United States and various international organizations push a

version of human rights that considers freedoms and rights supreme. The most notable acts of violation, as recorded in Western reports, are the excessive use of capital punishment, the one-child policy and its consequences (including a skewed birth rate for men), and restrictions of freedom of expression, movement, and religion. A Human Rights Watch Asia report from 1996 states that President Bill Clinton's unconditional renewal in 1994 of China's most-favored nation (MFN) trade status have improved the economy in China but not the human rights condition: "His unconditional renewal of MFN marked the end of effective international pressure on China to improve its human rights practices and the triumph of commercial diplomacy, with its self-serving premise that free enterprise leads to a free society. Two years later, the market economy in China was booming yet there is little evidence of a freer society or greater respect for human rights."[14] Moreover, China's severe control over Tibet while using harassment against its people has been subject to strong condemnation by the Western countries. Tibet now is considered a province of China even though during the dynasty era Tibet was under the rule of the emperor but not a Chinese territory: "Before the fall of the Empire, 'China Proper' was defined as the 18 provinces inside the Great Wall. The three provinces of Manchuria as well as the great outer dependencies of Mongolia and Tibet and Sinkiang, were treated as territories under the sovereignty of the emperor, but were not part of his Chinese dominions."[15]

Tibet is the world's highest territorial state, as well as the most remote and isolated, located southwest of China in the high Himalayan mountain area. Its famous summit is Mount Everest. Tibet covers an area of 1.2 million square kilometers with a population of 2.84 million as of 2007. The demographic statistics concerning Tibet are unsettled. The PRC government claims that the total number of people living in TAR according to national census in 1990 is 2.196 million people of whom 2.096 million, or 95.46 percent, are Tibetans.[16] As of 2007, the PRC contends that 95.6 percent of the population is Tibetan.On the other hand, the government of Tibet in exile considers that statistics given by the PRC government are biased since they disregard the Tibetan areas outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and do not include members of the Chinese Army in Tibet and unregistered migrants. Dr. Michael van Walt van Praag reflects the Tibetans' viewpoint regarding the population number in Tibet in a paper published in 1986: "To this day, the Chinese have sent a total of 6.2 million civilians into Tibet in addition to which they maintain at least 500,000 troops in the country. Since the Tibetan population is around six million, the Chinese have already outnumbered the Tibetans on the Tibetan plateau"[17] The government of Tibet in exile accuses the PRC of trying to make major changes to Tibet's demography in an attempt to submerge the ethnic Tibetans, thereby wiping out any chances of Tibetan independence. Some contend that Tibetans are now outnumbered by Chinese in the capital of Lhasa.

Tibet has a multifaceted history that has been studied by scholars through the prism of two contradictory perspectives—that of the Tibetans and that of the Chinese. Tibet's imperial past is glamorous, and Tibetans consider that it was once one of the most powerful empires with a highly developed civilization, which even conquered China several times. After the Mongol invasion, the dynamics of Tibet's relationships with outside states changed. The China/Tibet relationship had developed to that of priest-patron: "Tibet's lama provided religious instruction; performed rites, divination, and astrology; and offered the Khan flattering religious titles like 'protector of religion' or 'religious king.' The khan, in turn, protected and advanced the interests of the 'priest' (lama). The lamas also made effective regents through whom the Mongols ruled Tibet."[18]

Tibetans have several myths about their origins. One legend focuses on the importance of Buddhism in Tibetan life and claims that "the Tibetan race began thousands of years ago when a monkey who was a physical manifestation of Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of Compassion, mated with an ogress living in the mountains of Tibet. Their progeny were the forbears of modern Tibetans."[19] The other legend emphasizes the strong relationship throughout history between Tibet and India and argues that "the earliest settlers on the Tibetan plateau were refugees who escaped the conflicts described in the Indian epic poem Mahabharata."[20] Some historical Tibetan texts talk about the Zhang Zhung group that moved from the Amdo region to Tibet and are considered to be of the Bon religion. Others focus on the myth of the first Tibetan King—Nyatri Tsenpo—who is said to "have descended from Thedrang (the brang = the'u rang) and then took the name Nyatri…He had a tongue so large it covered his whole face, webbed fingers and a mien indicating ferocity and magic powers. For this reason the powerful Bonpos of Puwo said 'He is too powerful, we must exile him!'"[21] Thus Nyatri was exiled to Tibet. Chinese historians have a much simpler take on the process, and they assert that "Chinese tribes settled in Tibet and so the Tibetans are related to the Han."[22] Genetic studies seem to back up this perspective, indicating that the Tibetan people diverged from the Han two thousand years ago.

A source of contention between the Chinese and Tibetan people is the efficacy of the government system set up by the Chinese. Tibet maintained for centuries a feudal system that put power and wealth in the hands of the lamas and aristocrats, creating much inequality in the region. Most Tibetans were poor farmers who handed over the greater portion of the agricultural goods to the landlords. Tibet was, socially and economically, highly underdeveloped; its people suffered from widespread illness, malnutrition, illiteracy, and poverty. Despite this, most Tibetans seemed to be content with their peaceful and simple lives that are built upon old myths and profound spirituality: "Until the twentieth century, the Tibetan people were primarily farmers and pastoral nomads, with a clearly delineated peasantry and elite landowning class. The harsh conditions under which they lived engendered a reliance on a greater power, and a deep respect for spiritual values which is still evident in their lifestyle today."[23]

Tibetan social structure is based on religion. Buddhism is conceived as the essence of Tibetan civilization, culture, education, and politics, while exerting strong influence upon Tibetan people and controlling most aspects of their life. Monasteries, temples, and religious centers are found throughout villages and towns; altars and pictures of the Dalai Lama are present in almost every Tibetan home, despite the opposing views of the Chinese.

The most important political and religious figure in Tibet and the supreme head of Tibetan Buddhism is the Dalai Lama. The title "dalai lama" is best interpreted as "ocean of wisdom," and the Dalai Lama is believed to be the reincarnation of Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of Compassion. Tibet was ruled by successive kings and later on by successive religious leaders. In 1642 the fifth Dalai Lama, with the support of the Mongol ruler Gushir Khan, managed to unite Tibet and take power. The Dalai Lama became the spiritual leader and temporal ruler of Tibet starting with that era of a "harmonious blend of religion and politics." Since then nine successive dalai lamas were selected to continue the mission. The Dalai Lama was the head of Tibetan government from the seventeenth century until China's invasion of Tibet in 1959. However, his ruling was not completely independent of Chinese authority.

The current Dalai Lama is Tenzin Gyatso, who is a strong activist for Tibetan rights. Gyatso now

lives in India and maintains an intense public career of spiritualism and charity. He stands as a symbol of defiance to the Tibetan people even though he advocates autonomy from China rather than independence.

China considers the Dalai Lama to be a terrorist who preys on Tibetans and causes disorder; many others throughout the world have extremely positive views of the Dalai Lama. In 2011, the Chinese contended that a rash of self-immolations by Tibetan monks was ordered by the Dalai Lama. China has asserted the right to approve of all religious figures in the region and likely will push for a more moderate Lama after the fourteenth Lama passes. Now there are two competing Panchen Lamas, one Chinese-approved and the other approved by the current Dalai Lama. The Panchen Lama must approve the next Dalai Lama. The future battle for the next Lama is set, but for the time being, the current Dalai Lama serves as a symbol of religious piety and tolerance for the Tibetan people.

Chinese Rule and Separatism

To say the least, the introduction of Chinese rule was traumatic for the Tibetans and for Tibetan culture. From 1912 to 1950, Tibet was independent after expelling Chinese troops. China first reentered Tibet in 1950 and formalized their rule over the region in 1951 with the Seven Points Agreement. The PRC government put an end to theocracy and established a Communist regime. Today, although feudalism is gone, the the Dalai Lama claims that Tibetan people are no better off than they were before. It is of interest to note that the improvement in the standard of living of the Tibetans under the rule of the Chinese is a question of great debate between the Dalai Lama and the PRC government. As the former denies such progress, the latter confirms it. Moreover, the PRC government made major efforts to suppress opposition; religious practices were constrained, monasteries were destroyed, many monks and nuns were persecuted and even executed, and thousands of Tibetans were arrested and tortured. What little freedoms the Tibetans held was snuffed out ever so slowly.

The government of Tibet in exile, established by the fourteenth Dalai Lama in India, claims that Tibet is an independent nation and strongly condemns Chinese control over its territory. Moreover, the government of Tibet accuses the PRC of massacring the Tibetans, estimating the number of Tibetans who have died of violence since 1950 at approximately 1.2 million (this number is not reliable due to the lack of precise data). The government-in-exile considers the economic plans initiated by the PRC government to help modernize Tibet as politically oriented and aimed at implementing Chinese military control. The other side effect is the integration of Han Chinese disrupting internal Tibetan practices and traditions. As some contend, the Tibetans are slowly being conquered by peaceful migration. The government-in-exile accuses the PRC of adopting a policy that aims to dilute Tibet through demolishing its ethnic culture and identity, thus merging it with the rest of the Chinese nation with little awareness of Tibetan traditions.

The PRC government, conversely, argues that Tibet has been for centuries an autonomous region of China. A brief intermission of Chinese power while the Chinese state was destroyed and reconstructed around the Communist apparatus should not invalidate its traditional claim to the region. Tibetan lamas headed the internal government, but major decisions were made by the Chinese Emperors.

Aspects of power projection and international legitimacy come into question over the status of

Tibet. China cannot afford to allow the territory to slip away since it will be a sign of the decline of Chinese power and influence. The PRC government considers spreading its authority over Tibet justifiable and legitimate; the government has the right to exert control over its territory and to maintain order, enforce the law, and protect national security using all necessary means. From the Chinese perspective, the invasion of Tibet was a noble endeavor to release a backward country from the domain of an antiquated religious order. China claims the restoration of Chinese rule has been tremendously successful in the fields of the economy, health, and education. China contends that negative views of its domination of Tibet are promoted by the West in a quest to deny China its rightful place as a great power.

Western Perceptions of the Far East

For the purposes of our discussion, the West includes the United States and other affiliated powers such as Canada, France, and the United Kingdom. The Far East and Asia includes China and surrounding states such as Japan, Vietnam, and the Koreas. The West has for a long time perceived China as a remote and mysterious place, due in large part to the simple fact that distance hindered engagement. More important, China's rise and decline as a great power occurred during periods of internal conflict in the West and during the Dark Ages. When the West looks upon Chinese civilization, it fails to see its own image because China's development as a strong power occurred far from Western eyes. Fitzgerald, in his book *The Horizon History of China*, states, "The reason why Western man has found China so strange is that it is the only civilization the world has known upon which Western thought exercised no influence at all until modern times. It is also the only large region of the earth where Western men have never ruled."[24]

Unable to identify with its complex and vast structure—demographically and geographically—and lacking any experience with its culture, tradition, religions, policies and ideology, the West projected in China its own fantasies and illusions. The West developed its understanding of China through written and visual statements produced by people such as missionaries, diplomats, businessmen, journalists, and scholars. In the twentieth century we add filmmakers, producers, scriptwriters, and modern forms of communication such as the Internet, bloggers, and dissidents. The two main barriers that prevented the Western formulators from acquiring accurate knowledge of China are, first, the language that most of them know little or nothing of, and second, the travel to a very remote and closed country that many found difficult and even impossible.[25] In the eighteenth century, not many Westerners resided in or traveled to China: "J. B. du Halde, the greatest author of the age on China, never visited the country."[26] Nevertheless, most of the formulators of Western images of China, even specialists, have conceived China from their own backgrounds, ideologies, and experiences; moreover, their perception has been affected by the impact of the epoch and place in which they live.[27]

These misconceptions of China inhibited a true engagement of the country by the West and contributed in expanding negative images about it. The Western projection and perception of China in the modern history can best be studied through the Yellow Peril concept and the lens of Edward Said's Orientalism perspective.

An increase of Asian immigration into the Western world in the late 1800s through the early 1900s resulted in a particularly negative wave of hysteria. The movement has been termed the Yellow Peril,

and it was the embodiment of fear and hatred Westerners felt toward Asians and particularly the Chinese wave of immigrants. Cheap Chinese labor was accused of stealing American and European jobs. The fears developed into a much greater form of xenophobia perceiving Asians to be particularly dangerous and nefarious. The Yellow Peril had its deep roots in the medieval ages with the invasion of some Western countries by the Mongolian emperor Genghis Khan. The media was particularly effective in reviving the fear of the Asian race in the United States: "[Yellow Peril's] historical roots can be traced to the persistent theme in Western culture that the barbarian hordes of Asia, a yellow race, were always on the point of invading and destroying Christendom, Europe, and Western civilization itself. This interpretation of history contributed to racism in the United States."[28]

American perceptions of the Orient, and particularly of China, have largely been influenced by the Western media's ethnocentrism suggesting that the Orientalism perspective accurately reflects the mind-set of Westerners. Even though Said's theory focuses on the Orient (Middle East and Arab world), his ideas are as much applicable to China as anywhere else. Orientalism analyses how the West describes, interprets, and projects the East in a profoundly negative fashion. Said points out "Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[29] Orientalism as a perspective assumes that the West projects the image of the Asian and Middle Eastern world as being inferior, backward, and vicious compared to the civilized and virtuous West: "Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or—as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory—taken over."[30]

Hollywood, throughout its history, has represented China according to a Western viewpoint. The cinematic depiction of the Chinese has been correlated with US policy toward China, as well as the Western attitude toward the Asians. In the 1920s and 1930s, the fears of Chinese expansion (immigration) in the United States, reinforced through the circulation of racist thoughts by some US newspapers, pulp magazines, and books, found their way to Hollywood through dozens of movies portraying Chinese as dirty, criminals, and tyrants. In some movies Chinese were represented as good and helpful, yet their characters remained stereotypical and ridiculous (the Charlie Chan movies). As China turned into an ally in the 1940s, a more positive image of the Chinese was established. This shift was brief with the rise of Communist China after a long and destructive civil war in the late 1940s. Once China became ascendant in the region and regained their footing after conquest by the Japanese, Hollywood went right back into attack mode. Since then the image of China and the Chinese people in a considerable number of Hollywood movies has remained dark and mysterious. Hollywood movies engaging Asia tend to focus on stories involving rape, captivity, seduction, salvation, sacrifice, and authoritarianism. These stories serve as a metaphor for the threat imposed by the Asian races upon the Western culture: "Rape narratives pose the danger that the pure but hopelessly fragile and childlike white woman will be ruined by contact with the dark villain. Captivity stories go a step further and threaten to make the white heroine a permanent part of an alien culture. Seduction tales offer the possibilities that either the Caucasian woman or man will be tempted by the eroticism of Asia and will turn her or his back on Western Christendom."[31] Hollywood movies, in general, portray the Chinese as inferior, villainous, violent, immature, and in need of white support and leadership. Chinatowns as well are often depicted as dangerous places, home to vice and rampant crime. Furthermore, the movies represent imperial China, nationalist China, and later on, Communist China as an oppressive, uncivilized, and evil state. The rare movies that did

project a positive image of China were martial arts movies with Asian heroes who often had to fight off imposing and oppressive Asian villains (*Enter the Dragon*). A simple contrast between an Asian-produced martial arts movie such as *Once Upon a Time in China* or *Fists of Fury* and an American-produced martial arts movie such as *Enter the Dragon* and *Bloodsport* demonstrates the prevailing Orientalist view that dominates in Hollywood. In *Enter the Dragon* and *Bloodsport*, the villains are evil Fu Manchu sorts bent on world domination, while in the Asian films the villains are evil Western colonizers, typically American or British military officers.

Western negative views do not extend to perceptions of Tibet. Instead the region is mythologized as a holy place, a utopia of sorts, spoiled by Chinese intervention. Located at the highest point on earth, thus the closest to the sky, Tibet is a marvelous place with a divine power and ruled by a benevolent leader—the Dalai Lama. Tibet is a source of wisdom, spirituality, and insight that Westerners can learn from. The region is the heart of Buddhism, a religion that is widely spreading in the United States. Buddhism is now the fourth-largest religion in the United States.

Hollywood's vivid history with Tibet started as early as 1937 with the Frank Capra movie *Lost Horizon*. This film launched the myth of "virtual Tibet" worldwide. The movie reflects the Western fantasies about a mysterious and divine place hidden away from the rampant materialism of the Western world. It introduces Tibet to the West as a Shangri-La—a mythical paradise that exists hidden from greedy man. Through the years, many Hollywood movies were produced that have stimulated public imagination about the remote and idyllic place we know as Tibet. *Little Buddha*, *The Golden Child*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, *Kundun*, and many other Hollywood movies have helped Tibet enter the public's consciousness.

Due to its fascination with the unknown and the political dynamics of the times, Hollywood has always favored Tibet over China. For some, the dispute symbolizes the fight between virtue and wickedness, good and evil. In the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War conflict between the United States and Russia, and due to the enormous efforts of the Dalai Lama, the Sino-Tibetan conflict was brought to the forefront. The media and entertainment industry (through fiction films, documentaries, books, and popular music) focused on the occupied territory and its exiled leader. The narrative was that this sacred and peaceful land was viciously invaded by a Communist country. The Chinese sent to exile its divine leader and used all kinds of physical and cultural oppression to destroy the idea of Tibet. In 1997, the favorite theme for several remarkable Hollywood movies such as *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner* addresses the matter through direct or subliminal messages.

During an interview on PBS, December 3, 1996, at the time the conflict between Hollywood and China was escalating due to the new Disney movie *Kundun*, Elizabeth Farnsworth asked Orville Schell why Tibet is suddenly so much in Hollywood's orbit. Why is Hollywood paying so much attention to Tibet? Schell replied,

> I think, you know, the West and America has always had a fascination with Tibet. It is both a place that seems to be apart from all the imperatives of normal industrial life as we live it, but I think a new ingredient has been added since the Chinese occupation in '59, and that is the little guy, even though Tibet is as large as Western Europe, being kicked around by the big guy, namely China. And that is a very American theme, to root for the underdog, so on top of all the old fascinations with mystery, mountains, remoteness, roof of the world, forbidden kingdom, et cetera, we've

added this new dimension, which I think makes it a very compelling subject for Americans.[32]

The Production Politics of Film as a Context to Study Hollywood's Representations of the Sino-Tibetan Conflict

Film is an art form holding strong cultural characteristics, while its primary objective is to make financial gain by attracting the widest audiences to theaters and managing to entertain them. Due to its strong power in communicating messages to the masses, film has gained significant importance among politicians, decision makers, governments, and all other forms of organizations, groups, and institutions, as well as individuals wishing to communicate politics. Since the early days of its history, film has been connected to politics, and the interplay of film, politics, and propaganda gained a greater significance among scholars, with movies such as *The Triumph of the Will* exhibiting the potential of the medium.

Hollywood film is at the center of US politics, culture, and economy. The relationship between Hollywood and US government is based on the mutual benefits of the two parties and the strong interconnectedness between politics, economy, and business that dominates over this relationship. Ernest Giglio explains in his book *Here's Looking at You: Hollywood, Film and Politics*, "The symbiotic relationship between government and the film industry has ramifications beyond political campaigns and public relations gambits. Government and special interests groups exploit the reputation and popularity of film stars, and Hollywood keeps an eye on state policies that might impact the industry."[33] Moreover, the economic factor surpasses the political one of Hollywood's placement in the US government agenda as the trade of Hollywood products has gained a strong direct effect on the US economy. Thus Hollywood has the economic weight to prevent political issues from jeopardizing its business interests: "The film industry lobbies Washington. Motion pictures represent a significant global economic power, a far cry from their humble beginnings in penny arcades and urban nickelodeons. Hollywood films have become the second-largest American export after military hardware."[34]

As an entertainment project addressed to the public, the film industry has attracted the attention of businessmen who saw in this art form a successful business enterprise and rushed to exploit it to make financial gain. The business of films started to flourish with the emergence of the Hollywood studios that based their production mode on Fordist strategy. "Hollywood's mode of production has been characterized as a factory system akin to that used by a Ford plant, and Hollywood often praised its own work structure for its efficient mass production of entertaining films. The employment of mass-production system fulfilled the owners' goals of profit maximization."[35]

Hollywood witnessed its first revolution in its mode of production after World War II as it became "an increasingly dispersed and decentralized industry in which agents, stars, directors and writers worked with independent producers to originate individual projects conceived outside the assembly line and economy-of-scale principles of classic Hollywood."[36] Meanwhile, the role of major Hollywood companies was reduced mainly to finance and distribution.[37] The 1970s and 1980s brought about more innovation in mode of production while entering the age of blockbuster movies. *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s* addresses the issue of the production mode of Hollywood film, indicating that it was at the beginning a Fordist-like mode

"centred on a fixed production site, an in-house division of labour (the assembly line) and producer-units."[38] While the new production mode of Hollywood film is "based (at the production end) on the package deal and driven (at the exhibition end) by more market-oriented, targeted campaigns."[39] This new mode known as package production emerged in the 1970s and 1980s due to the integration of Hollywood production companies within conglomerate companies: "Its economic and managerial organization is that of conglomerate ownership, as it evolved across the two major waves of mergers and takeovers, the first in the early 1970s (by companies seeking diversification), and the second in the late 1980s (by companies seeking synergies). The diversified nature of conglomerate ownership necessarily leads to decentralization, sub-contracting and outsourcing, which would be a more technical description of the package deal."[40] Film production shifted from standardized to diversified to reach different markets outside the United States and even outside the Western markets. A good example of this shift is Bruce Lee movies exposing the Western audience to Hong Kong culture through highlighting Hong Kong martial arts.

Hollywood's mode of production in the twentieth century was in line with US culture, politics, and economy. Hollywood has been reflecting different cultures according to Western norms and values, where individualism, freedom, democracy, and human rights prevail. Culture also holds political messages, as Keith Booker explains in his book *From Box Office to Ballot Box: The American Political Film*: "All culture is political, in the sense that all cultural production is rooted in specific ideological contexts and all cultural artifacts carry the traces of these ideological origins."[41] Hollywood film in the majority of the twentieth century is regarded as having culturally artistic form crafted by skillful scriptwriters and filmmakers holding to their ideological tendencies, but it is also designed to serve through US culture, politics, and economy the business interests of the production companies. The big title that dominates most Hollywood films during that epoch is "America vs. the World."

The production politics of Hollywood film witnessed major transformations in the twenty-first century imposed by the necessity of entering the globalization age. More ambitious strategies, where the movie is set in a wider context of global market, were employed. The major transformation in the new century is the return of Hollywood companies to a model of foreign investment, mainly through coproduction projects, so the film has become the output of multinational collaboration.

As described by Time Warner, "globalization dictated that the top players in the business develop long-term strategies to build on a strong base of operations at home while achieving 'a major presence in all of the world's important markets.'"[42] In practice, this meant that companies upgraded international operations to a privileged position by expanding "horizontally" to tap emerging markets worldwide, by expanding "vertically" to form alliances with independent producers to enlarge their rosters, and by "partnering" with foreign investors to secure new sources of financing. Achieving these goals led to a merger movement in Hollywood that has yet to run its course.[43]

Thus the three major factors dominating the production of the Hollywood film are culture, politics, and economy. The harmonious relationship between these factors in the twentieth century brought about production politics of Hollywood film that fit within the American democratic, capitalist colonial system. A good example of the US/Hollywood relationship is in Hollywood's role in China. Hollywood brought Western culture to China at the beginning of the twentieth century to serve US expansion goals in Asia and to gain a wide acceptance for American products in the Chinese market: "Hollywood definitely helped shape the consumer culture and consumption patterns in twentieth-

century China. Its function as an advertising tool for US manufactured goods was one of the reasons that the Department of Commerce of the US government set up Motion Picture Division to support the film industry's overseas expansion."[44]

However, the twenty-first century is marked by the strong interaction of four factors: the global market, conglomerate media corporations, coproduction schemes, and the growth of China to a global power. This new situation has brought about a conflict of interests between goals of the United States as a state and Hollywood companies. Hollywood now seeks diversification in its productions to universalize the experience of film. In this new mode of production, film will combine with different cultures through a universal context to appeal to the global market. The movies that started to appear at the beginning of the twenty-first century, such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, a Hollywood-Chinese-Hong Kong-Taiwanese coproduction released in 2000, reflect different cultures and raise some fundamental questions concerning Hollywood's position in the global milieu. Will Hollywood in the twenty-first century aim to protect its investments in the Chinese and global market by going beyond its commitment to the United States to reach China and the rest of the world? Will Hollywood films become a tool in the hands of the Chinese government to serve China's political, cultural, and economic interests and its expansion goal in the West? In this book, we examine the correlation linking Hollywood movies to politics, culture, economics, and globalization. Here we study how these factors impact Hollywood's perception of China and Tibet and also how Hollywood's actions in the film production process affect the course of Sino-Tibetan conflict.

As a business enterprise Hollywood focuses on strong themes that attract people to movie theaters. As war films have a greater potential to achieve success at the box office, Hollywood has been attuned to the ongoing conflicts of the past and present. Hardly a year goes by without a major war movie being produced. Foreign policy tensions are often dramatized in television and movies. This, coupled with the perspective of rooting for the underdog despite America's superpower status, has produced a consistent ideology that dramatizes and covers the events of the world. Depending on the era, certain themes dominated. During World War II and the surrounding years, it was the pluck and ingenuity of American heroes dramatized in such movies as the *Longest Day* and *To Hell and Back*. During the height of the Cold War, the fear of the evil Soviets led to such movies as *Fail Safe*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and even *Red Dawn*, where Nicaragua invades Colorado with the help of the Russians and Cubans. The era of malaise and disenchantment with war climaxed with such movies as *Deer Hunter*, *Platoon*, and *Hamburger Hill*. The post-Cold War, New World Order era ushered in a whole new type of movie concerned with human rights and democratic progress. *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner* were produced, as well as such movies as *Hotel Rwanda*, *The Constant Gardener*, and *Schindler's List*. As it is an international moneymaking enterprise, Hollywood and the American film industry have always reflected popular demands and desires. These movies reflect the outlook and ideology of Americans and the American film audience. The goal of our book is to examine these perspectives and uncover how the West's outlook toward the East has changed and developed in the context of international events and globalization.

This book views Hollywood from a political, ethnocultural, and economic perspective. We investigate how celebrities and movies represent history and international affairs. Even though some research has explored Hollywood's involvement in politics, mainly in the periods of World War II and the Cold War, almost none has examined Hollywood and its relationship with the Sino-Tibetan conflict. We seek to examine Hollywood's perspective concerning the circumstances and

consequences of some movies. Here we raise the following fundamental questions: How did Hollywood introduce China and Tibet to the West? Are Hollywood movies covering China politically oriented? Why does Hollywood side with Tibet in its struggle for freedom? What is the message that movies such as *The Golden Child*, *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet* and *Red Corner* are trying to deliver? How does China respond to such movies? More important, how does the American public respond to such initiatives? Did Tibet take hold in the popular imagination, or was it eventually discarded like so many other Hollywood humanitarian projects (famine, disease, genocide)? Finally, does the *2012* movie, released in 2009, mark a turning point in Hollywood's representation of China and the Sino-Tibetan conflict?

Plan of the Book

The main question that remains is if Hollywood will persist in its plan to disturb a growing superpower by continuing to produce movies that are antithetical to Chinese perspectives. What is the current state of the film industry in relation to Tibet and activism? Does Shangri-La exist and is it in Tibet, or is the true Shangri-La to be found in the vast profits available to Hollywood if they morph their outlook to be more conciliatory toward the rising Chinese superpower?

The book explores a new perspective concerning a resolution of Sino-Tibetan conflict, bearing in mind that Hollywood's tremendous efforts to boost international awareness of Tibetans' struggle for freedom while promoting the Chinese regime as oppressive fall short of what is required for the American film industry to grow globally or to bring peace to Tibet. The innovative cinematic resolution the book suggests to the conflict is more compatible with China's global position in the twenty-first century and Hollywood expansion plans in the Chinese market while taking into consideration the importance of preserving the Tibetan Buddhist culture within the geographic borders of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

The plan of the book will proceed as follows: Chapter 2 explores the historical construction of Western images of China and Tibet. It studies specifically the development of inaccurate views of both cultures and the context behind these views. Chapter 3 discusses our theoretical perspectives and the specific images Hollywood has created of Asia through an examination of such movies as the Fu Manchu series and *Lost Horizon*. How have past political and cultural concerns molded the international outlook of the cultural tastemakers in Hollywood? Why does the West mythologize Tibet and demonize China?

Chapters 4 and 5 move the project to the modern day as we examine the events and movies of 1997. Through an examination of *Kundun*, *Red Corner*, and *Seven Years in Tibet*, we are able to demonstrate how Hollywood became engaged in the Tibet conflict and continued to demonize China. A new development is the juxtaposition of views of China and Tibet where China is the "evil" and Tibet is the "greater good." These views emerged in the 1990s due to the international political situation demonstrating the connection between film and politics. Here we dissect the interplay between films, politics, and culture.

Chapter 6 moves our book in a more critical direction as we raise the question of the accuracy regarding 1997 movies and establish the correlation between propaganda and movies. Chapter 7 examines the impact of the Hollywood movies on the Free Tibet movement and on politics. While China reacted strongly to the movies in 1997, the ability of Hollywood to set the agenda was short

lived, and the movement was not able to be an enduring movement for peace and justice. Instead it has become increasingly irrelevant, and the events in Tibet since 2008 have received little coverage in the media because Hollywood and cultural taste makers are no longer interested in setting the agenda in favor of Tibet because it will harm economic relations with China.

Chapter 8 moves us to the twenty-first century as we analyze more recent movies that display images of China and highlight the new Hollywood perspective, which is much more accommodating of China in light of its economic potential as a marketplace. The movie *2012* is particularly highlighted as a harbinger of the future. This was the first movie to present China overwhelmingly positively, as it helps save the world in the face of global disaster and also places Tibet squarely within Chinese domain. We conclude the book with a reflection on our findings and suggest a path forward for Hollywood, Tibet, and China.

Our goal in this project is to analyze and describe the context of Hollywood filmmaking that engages the Asian regions. Specifically, we intend to delineate how Hollywood projects Chinese and Tibetan images. More important, our project is a tale of the interplay between politics, economics, and culture as seen through the realm of film. We demonstrate the continued Orientalist construction of Asian images in Hollywood but also how these views have morphed to meet the demands of the globalized political economy. In 1997, Hollywood found it advantageous to demonize China and mythologize Tibet, but by the beginning of the twenty-first century Hollywood no longer participates in this project and instead supports China's political and cultural perspective because, in large part, it makes economic sense to do so. Right or wrong, the issues that dominate the global political system determine how cultural projects are constructed.

Chapter 2
China and Tibet through Western Eyes

China: From Marco Polo to the Boxer Uprising

The Western world has continuously held a skeptical, unrealistic, and superficial view of China as a state since first coming into direct contact with the region. The images of the Chinese people and their way of life in imperial history are projected in the works of Western novelists, scholars, missionaries, philosophers, diplomats, reporters, and businessmen.

Some Western image formulators have tried to keep their perspectives of China positive and objective, but Western biases are hard to overcome. Many fall into the trap of ethnocentrism. One reason for this is the relationship of dominance of West over East. The Western states that have been dominant have shifted through time, from France in the eighteenth century to the United Kingdom in the nineteenth to the United States in the twentieth. Despite, or because of these shifts, Western perceptions of China have shifted according to who the dominant power was, but the image of China in the United States has remained negative and paternalistic. For the Chinese, the dominant enemy image revolves around whichever state is the global power and also shifts through time.

The West first became aware of Eastern Asia during the Medieval Age in relation to two major events: the expansion of the Mongol Empire and the accounts of Marco Polo. Some in the West regarded the Mongol conquest of some regions in Eastern Europe such as Poland, Silesia, and Hungary as an opportunity. They wanted to make the Mongols allies in the fight against Russia and Islamic states. To achieve this end, the pope sent several delegations to the khan court, with Polo joining the last one in 1271. The apostolic delegations did not succeed in their mission; however, Polo managed through his book *The Travels of Marco Polo* to break boundaries between Europe and China and to help open the channels of communication and trade between the two regions.

Polo is considered the first formal chronicler of Chinese perspectives. His book invokes grandiose images of Chinese prosperity, describing its land, court, palaces, cities, festivals, and emperor as striking and dreamlike. This chronicle triggered the West's imagination and interest for the first time. The following passage is typical of Polo's style:

> [The Grand Khan] is styled Kublai'-kaan; the latter word implying in our language lord of lords, and with much propriety added to his name; for in respect to number of subjects, extent of territory, and amount of revenue, he surpasses every sovereign that has heretofore been or that

> now is in the world; nor has any other been served with such implicit obedience by those whom he governs[1]…[The Grand Khan lives in magnificent palaces as the most fabulous is the Imperial Palace of Kanbalu.] In the rear of the body of the palace there are large buildings containing several apartments, where is deposited the private property of the monarch or his treasure in gold, silver bullion, precious stones and pearls, and also his vessels of gold and silver plate[2]…Upon [his] anniversary the Grand Khan appears in a superb dress of cloth of gold, and on the same occasion full twenty thousand nobles and military officers are clad by him in dresses similar to his own in point of color and form, but the materials are not equally rich.[3]

The Travels of Marco Polo, widely translated and circulated in Europe at that time, projects the grand khan as full of benevolence and showing great care for the welfare of his people: "The grand khan sends every year his commissioners to ascertain whether any of his subjects have suffered in their crops of corn from unfavorable weather, from storms of wind or violent rains, or by locusts, worms or any other plague; and in such cases he not only refrains from exacting the usual tribute of that year, but furnishes them from his granaries with so much corn as is necessary for their subsistence, as well as for sowing their land."[4]

Polo addresses in his book the question of Christianity—a subject at the core of Western civilization—with great caution. He describes the grand khan's tolerance toward the four great religions in the world and points out cleverly the khan's great admiration for the Christian virtues in particular. According to Polo, the grand khan honored and respected the four great prophets worshipped by different classes of mankind—the Christ, Mohammed, Moses, and Sogomombar-khan. "But from the manner in which his majesty acted towards them, it is evident that he regarded the faith of the Christians as truest and the best; nothing, as he observed, being enjoined to its professors that was not replete with virtue and holiness."[5]

Marco Polo's account of wealth and exotic cultures of the East had an enduring impact upon the European people for many centuries. Polo's projections served a bridge of sorts between two distinctly dissimilar cultures. Unfortunately this bridge only went one way and served to leave an inaccurate but lasting impression on Western civilization. Polo's book "has become one of the most famous literary compositions of the thirteenth century, and has influenced the development of culture in Western Europe—the only piece of writing of its kind. It is said that Christopher Columbus studied the 'Book' before leaving for his historical journey to the coasts of the New World."[6]

The political context of Polo's writing was one of continued dreams of colonization and conquest. Far-off and majestic lands contained wealth and resources unheard of in the West. Much like movies today, the book at the time projected an image of a land unknown to most audiences. That these views might be inaccurate is of little consequence; what mattered was the spectacular nature of the entire production.

The enduring importance of Marco Polo cannot be underestimated. To this day, American children play a swimming pool game called Marco Polo where they look for a missing traveler through blind eyes. *The Travels of Marco Polo* has stimulated the imagination of Westerners since it was published in the thirteenth century and captured the American film industry's attention centuries later. Four movies were made out of the tome, starting with *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (1938) to the most recent version *Marco Polo* (2007).

The first significant Sino-European contact after the overtures by the pope, and the first serious attempt to understand China and its people, took place in the seventeenth century. As a part of their plan to convert the Chinese to Christianity, Jesuit missionaries learned the Chinese language to gather intelligence about the inner workings of Chinese society, politics, customs, and culture. Despite their ulterior motives, the Jesuit priests played a significant role in expanding communication between Western and Eastern cultures: "[They] became intermediaries between Europe and China. The missionaries published books on China in Europe and on European—mostly scientific and religious—topics in China."[7]

One of the most remarkable books produced by the Jesuit group regarding China was written by Matteo Ricci, who "appears to have been the first European to become fully aware of the Chinese intellectual tradition and transmit that knowledge to the West. His book describes their achievements in mathematics, astronomy and medicine, as well as the importance of the Confucian classics in Chinese society."[8] Ricci tried to find a common ground between Christianity and Confucianism, creating "a synthesis which was acceptable both in Europe and in China. Ricci left the social and moral ideology of Confucianism intact, but completed it with spiritual tenets of Christianity."[9]

Likewise, Jean Baptist Du Halde's work, *The General History of China: Containing a Geographical, Historical, Chronological, Political and Physical Description of the Empire of China, Chinese Tartary, Corea and Thibet*, is highly significant for its contribution to the understanding of China in the eighteenth century. Du Halde provides an encyclopedic survey that is based on the reports of 27 Jesuits residing in China at the time. The chronicle offers some amazing images of the country, people, and emperor.

Just as Du Halde did, many more Western chroniclers, novelists, and scholars who offered perspectives of China and the East never visited the country or region. During the eighteenth century the Western perception of China was influenced by some great Western thinkers whose sole base of knowledge was gathered from Jesuit writings. Some reflected dark images of China as an authoritarian state, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu. Many of the philosophers, fascinated by the Chinese system, ideology, and religion, were motivated by personal interests. Several Sinophile philosophers exaggerated in flattering China and used it as model to criticize their own societies.[10] Great philosophers such as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (a German mathematician, philosopher, historian, and jurist), Voltaire (one of the greatest French poets, philosophers, historians, and dramatists), Francois Quesnay (a well-known French economist and a leading figure in the physiocrats school) praised China and raised through their writings awareness of Confucius, which had a great impact upon European society at that time. Voltaire replies to critics,

> Let us leave the Chinese and Indians to enjoy their lovely climate and their antiquity in peace. Above all let us stop calling the emperor of China and the soubab of Decan idolaters. We should not be fanatical about the merits of the Chinese: the constitution of their empire is in fact the best in the world, the only one founded entirely on paternal power (which doesn't prevent the mandarins from caning their children); the only one in which the governor of a province is punished when he fails to win the acclamation of the people upon leaving office; the only one that has instituted prizes for virtue, while everywhere else the laws are restricted to punishing crime; the only one that has made its conquerors adopt its laws, while we are still subject to the customs

of the Burgundians, the Franks, and the Goths, who subjugated us.[11]

During the nineteenth century, images of China faded from the spectacular to the gloomy. The reason behind this shift is clear: at that time the Chinese empire started to collapse affecting the economy and causing serious deterioration in the standard of living of its people. This change was outwardly evident and expressed in the chronicles of the time. Another factor was the shift from Jesuit missionaries to Protestant missionaries, who were much less forgiving in their views of the Chinese culture. Likewise, the industrial revolution lead to the great technological progress in Europe and gave the Western people a feeling of supremacy that made them view China as inferior.

At that period diplomats particularly expressed negative views of China after dealing with the complex and sprawling bureaucracy in the state. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* depicted the corruption, the dictatorship, and cruelty in the Chinese system in explicit detail. The fantastical images of the past slowly faded to be replaced by more hegemonic discourses that centered on the idea of the region as an "other" of a different sort than Europe and inferior to it.

In the twentieth century, perceptions of China were dominated by the new hegemon, the United States of America. The dominant perspective was once again crafted by novelists, diplomats, travelers, journalists, and businessmen, but also Western immigrations into China and Chinese immigrants into the West. In addition to greater migration flows, the new development was the advent of the motion picture. The media and the film industry crafted a view of China fraught with complications and misunderstandings.

Due to the increased media availability in the region at the time, views of China ebbed and flowed according to internal and external developments. The Boxer Rebellion was the first event to influence perceptions of China. The Boxer uprising against European missionaries and residents was received negatively in the West, and views by Europeans and Americans spurred on further intervention by Western governments: "The Boxer uprising merely served to confirm the worst suspicions and fears of the Westerners. A flood of reports flowed back to the West describing what had happened. In terms of images, the main burden of the reports was the courage and generally fine behaviour of the Western missionaries and other residents in the face of attack by the ragged Chinese Boxer peasants. The main images of the Chinese to emerge from literature spawned by the Boxer uprising are cruelty, treachery and xenophobia."[12] Unfortunately, these views were widely inaccurate and are indicative of a pattern to come: the West can do no wrong, and of course the East is full of evil people whose sole goal is to take advantage of those trying to help. The real story behind the Boxer Rebellion is of a movement born out of frustration with foreign intervention in China. The Boxers were members of a secret society who gathered to practice boxing and other forms of calisthenics. At first, the Boxers were against the Chinese dynasty and the state apparatus, but when the Chinese empress backed the Boxers, the tone of the conflict turned toward a movement solely against foreign control. Upset at the lack of sovereignty and control in the region, the Boxers sought to remove those they saw as colonizers of China. The Boxers were destroyed by a combined foreign force of more than two thousand troops. To restore control and protect economic interests, the West intervened in China on a massive scale and not for the first time. It cannot be dismissed that incidents such as this hardened negative Chinese perceptions toward the West. Certainly for the West, the story was about the protection of missionaries and business interests.

More sympathetic images of China started to emerge in the 1920s and coalesced into a more positive view of China as it sought to fight off the Japanese during World War II. Space precludes us from dissecting the relationship between the West and Japan, but the main thrust of the problem had to do with the scope of Japanese interests in the Pacific and Asian region once they became a great power. The West actively denied Japan's ability to colonize and take control of territories so they could never become economically self-sufficient in terms of resources, trade, and industrial production. Evidently, racial elements exasperated by immigration increased tensions. When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1933, the process of hatred toward the Japanese and sympathy toward China was complete. China was a nation worthy of support and rescue when faced with a foreign occupier who defied the West—Japan.

These positive views of China did not extend to the Chinese people themselves. The United States witnessed an increased wave of racism toward the Far East from about 1880 until the late 1970s. After the 1970s, various national groups have been denigrated (Japan in the 1980s, China in the 2000s with the Tiger Mom construct, Latinos in the 2010's), but overall Asian people have succeeded to gain acceptance within the American society. The more positive developments are still overshadowed, but a persuasive system of racism cumulated with the forced detention of all Japanese Americans living in the United States during World War II. The racist views of Chinese people are well documented in Hollywood movie productions at the time, as we will demonstrate in the next chapter.

After World War II and the successful Communist victory in the Chinese civil war in the late 1940s, perceptions of China took on a negative turn. After 1949, China closed its doors to the West and capitalism in general. The Korean War exasperated tensions once again, with China intervening on the side of the North Koreans when the American advance got too close to China. Some American leaders talked openly of invading China, and movies such as the *Manchurian Candidate* crystallized views of the Chinese as the enemy at the time.

The negative images of China had been reinforced during the late Cold War and into the 1990's as a consequence of China's consistent violation of human rights protocols at the time. As China recovered from the Cultural Revolution and emerged as a great power in the 1990s, it was not without fear and consternation at its ongoing policies in regards to human rights, democracy, and Tibet. The West's perception of China at that period is best articulated in Colin Mackerras's book *Western Images of China*: "There have been two basically contradictory images of China in the period from 1989 to the middle of 1998. On the one hand, China has had the image of a burgeoning economy and a rising standard of living. On the other hand, it has had the reputation of a country with a poor human rights records where, despite the increasing prosperity, individuals are not well treated and dissidents, both political and religious, are persecuted."[13] The Tiananmen Square incident, the crackdown on Falun Goung, and continued harassment and imprisonment of human rights activists and lawyers continues to reinforce the West's negative impressions of China. During the 1990's the dominant foreign policy debate was between engaging China and containing the rising power. During the 2010's this debate has changed from proactive policies to reactive policies accepting China's inevitable rise. China continues to invoke fear in the West due to their increasing military and economic power. China has systematically acquired American debt, and this development has unsettled some who believe China is now in control of Western monetary policy. Despite this relationship of a two-way street—Western failure would impact China as much as any other state—

the dominant view is of Chinese control and encroachment on Western power.

Until the last few decades, views of China were constructed by the Westerners according to information acquired through limited and sometimes inappropriate sources, unlike the perceptions of other countries that are constructed by the Western public according to a flow of information reaching it from different channels such as research, books, tourists, businessmen, magazines, television programs, sporting events, films, and others. From this flow of information, accurate and otherwise, people tend to select the images that best suit their own needs as well as their own understanding.[14] The flow of information from China to the West has been for centuries very limited due to three main factors: China's distant location, language barriers, and constrained political system. Thus Westerners formed their perspectives of this Far East country according to their fantasies and illusions that are projected through fiction, mainly novels and movies, rather than facts. This flaw in the communication has intensely contributed in the emergence of some destructive images of China in the West.

Tibet: From Herodotus in 440 BC to the Theosophical Society

The West's perception of Tibet has been shaped by legends and illusions because accurate information about this remote country, isolated from the outside world, has been difficult to obtain. Herodotus, the first to document legends of Tibet, wrote around 440 BC *Histories Apodeixis*, which is divided into nine books. He traveled around the ancient world gathering information for his histories that focus mainly on Greco-Persian Wars. The Greek historian also mentions in his third book a legend about some giant ants, living near Tibetan tribes, which dig up sands mixed with gold while building their underground home. Gold seekers quickly grab the sand and flee before the ants notice their existence and chase them.[15] These ancient sources formulate the first Western images of Tibet rooted on a myth that continued with Marco Polo's accounts, which gained popularity in the West. Polo never reached Tibet but instead reports what he heard from the Chinese. He writes in his book that "Tibetans are necromancers, and by their infernal art perform the most extraordinary and delusive enchantments that were ever seen or heard of. They cause tempests to arise, accompanied with flashes of lightning and thunderbolts, and produce many other miraculous effects."[16] Thus the West started developing this fantasy about Tibet as "a land of magic and mystery, of talking statues, of levitating yogins and flying monks,"[17] where the Lamas and other magicians and astrologers possess a diabolical power that enables them to control the weather and to carry out diverse supernatural deeds.

The image of Tibet became more encouraging with the arrival of European missionaries to Lhasa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In his report *The New Discoveries of the Great Cathay or of the Kingdoms of Tibet*, originally written in Portuguese in 1626 and translated to Spanish, Italian, French, and German, the Portuguese Jesuit Antonio de Andrade, the first Westerner to set foot in Tibet (disguised as a Hindu from India), provides a brighter and more tangible image of Tibet. He also points out the similarity between Tibetan Buddhism and Christianity: "De Andrade opines that the Tibetans even had an idea of a son of god who had become human (probably the nirmanakaya), as well as the notion of the Most Holy Trinity, the three Jewels (dkon mchog gsum). He mentions the practice of confession and the use of holy water, with which an absolution is undertaken, and which one might consider a sort of baptism."[18] The Portuguese Jesuit works, influenced mainly by legends while describing culture, customs, and ceremonies, provided the foundation for "Shambhala." "De

Andrade and the reception given to his reports in the first third of the seventeenth century are key factors in the further cultivation of the myth of Tibet in Europe."[19]

A century later, another missionary, the Italian Jesuit Ippolito Desideri, whose records are seen as extremely valuable, shows a lot of sympathy toward the Tibetan people and has much respect for their culture. Despite this, his discontent with Buddhism is evident. Buddhism is founded upon the belief in the transmigration of the soul: "the source of all the errors of the false Thibettan religion is the abominable belief in metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls, which they themselves declare to be an involved, intricate and inexplicable labyrinth."[20] He also reveals his great repulsion toward some of the more outrageous common practices (at least to Westerners) such as polyandry (woman having more than one husband), mortuary (feeding the dead to eagles and dogs), superstitions ruling the tribunal system, and other aspects of Tibetan life. His writings hold evidence of feelings of disappointment for failing to convert these good yet mystified people to Christianity. Desideri still manages to write about Tibetan beliefs with certain objectivity; he relies on his investigations and reflections to project his thoughts with a sophisticated philosophic approach.

> He thought that probably the Tibetans consistently rejected all belief in deities with such vehemence because they wanted at all costs to avoid the cult of any sort of anthropomorphic, superficial, or immoral gods, of which there are such a large number in other regions of Asia. So he asked further: Are the Tibetans atheists? Theoretically yes, but practically and implicitly they did indeed venerate God, since they often praised his attributes, such as omniscience and mercy. They also believed in an immortal soul—otherwise how could they believe in rebirth? What also impressed him were the monk's high degree of discipline and the ascetics' nobility, since both lived in constant contemplation and with an extreme lack of life's necessities.[21]

Moreover, Desideri's deep concern about religion resulted in several writings demonstrating the truthfulness of Christian dogma and the misleading nature of the Buddhism religion. He writes about religion using a philosophical approach in some of his most significant works such as *Concerning the Origin of Things*, *The Essence*, and *The Morning Dawn*. In 1718 the Vatican sent the Capuchin missionaries to Tibet, putting an end to the mission of Desideri, who left in 1721 with valuable, comprehensive, and accurate records about this remote country and its people.

The Capuchins managed to establish a friendly relationship with the Tibetans, and they were even allowed to build a church in Lhasa. The Capuchins's records have been summarized by the Augustinian monk Antonios Georgius in his 820–page book *Alphabetum Tibetanum*. This massive compendium consists of a wide collection of facts and myths about Tibet and provides a vivid description of the Tibetan life, culture, customs, festivals, ceremonies, history, religion, and geography. In the late eighteenth century England became interested in establishing trade relations with Tibet, and it sent several officers to the area, among them George Bogle (1775) and Samuel Turner (1783), who wrote their own journals about Tibet. Bogle and Turner depict some similarities between Christianity and Buddhism and draw some positive and dreamlike images of Tibet and its people. Bogle wrote about his experience in Tibet: "When I look on the time I have spent among these hills it appears like a fairy dream. The novelty of the scenes, and the people I have met with, and the novelty of the life I have led, seem a perfect illusion. Although my days have been spent without

business or amusement, they have passed on without care or uneasiness, and I may set this down as the most peaceful period of my life."[22] The colorful accounts of the eighteenth-century Western missionaries and British officers of this remote exotic culture form the source from which the West has gradually developed its fantasies about Tibet. Tibet has progressively grown to be a spiritual and illusionary refuge for the Westerners seeking to escape the greed and routine of the industrial world. Through these developments several amazing, mythical images emerged, setting the roots for Shangri-La legend.

The image of Tibet in the nineteenth century became increasingly negative because missionaries, traders, and other emissaries continued to find resistance from the Tibetans to assimilation. Throughout this period Tibet closed its doors to Westerners at a time when Europe was expanding—politically and scientifically. The Western missions, failing to enter Tibet, managed to establish stations along its southern borders. The missionaries, unable to make direct contact with the Tibetans, formulated their own myth of Tibet emphasizing the darker aspects of the culture due to their desire to stress the importance of a desperately needed Christian enlightenment. The missionaries saw the monks as the main obstacle preventing them from reaching Lhasa; therefore, they depicted the monasteries in their writings as sources of evil.

The missionaries' works focused on the awkward traits of the Tibetans as being dirty, hostile, sexually perverted, mendacious, and heathen. On the other hand, Thomas Manning, a Cambridge scholar, succeeded in slipping into Lhasa. Manning describes Lhasa streets and people as dirty but projects some flattering images about Tibet. Manning, who met with the Dalai Lama, was deeply impressed by his appearance and portrayed him as a divine being. Manning's flattering description of the Potala and the Dalai Lama composed the substance from which the Western idea of god/king would emerge in the future. Manning writes, "The Lama's beautiful and interesting face and manner engrossed almost all my attention. He was at that time about seven years old and had the simple and unaffected manners of a well-educated, princely child. His face was, I thought, poetically and affectingly beautiful. He was of a gay and cheerful disposition; his beautiful mouth perpetually unbending into a graceful smile, which illuminated his whole countenance."[23] The image of Tibet in twentieth century media improved gradually in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion and European response. In 1903, a troop expedition led by Colonel Francis Younghusband advanced into Lhasa to protect the British-India frontier from Russian incursions. Even though the writers who accompanied Younghusband formulated at first very negative images about Tibet to justify their mission of enlightening the "dark civilization" and bringing modernity to this world, later on the British found this region to be a reliable ally that could serve its political interests. "After 1910, the British began to describe Tibetan government and society as decent, virtuous, and of value to the world at large—generally the sort of image that we might have expected if the Tibetans had hired a modern American public relations firm!"[24]

Moreover, Younghusband's memoir *India and Tibet*, in which he describes the revelation he experienced during his last days in Lhasa as he was contemplating Lhasa from a mountainside, contributed in building up the image of Tibet as a mystic/holy land where spirituality, love, and magic might prevail. The most impressive moment of his revelation is near the end. Younghusband writes, "This exhilaration of the moment grew and grew till it thrilled through me with overpowering intensity. Never again could I think evil, or ever again be at enmity with any man. All nature and all humanity were bathed in a rosy glowing radiancy; and life for the future seemed nought but buoyancy

and lights." Younghusband concludes that amazing part, stating, "That single hour in leaving Lhasa was worth all the rest of a lifetime."[25]

In the first half of the twentieth century, Tibet became an exciting challenge to the Western writers, researchers, and adventurers who had been racing to discover the unknown. At that time, esoteric spiritual practices gained popularity in the West due to fantastical stories about Buddhist powers and the need of some to find meaning in their lives that was not provided by Western religious ideas. The most remarkable works that contributed in formulating the myth of Tibet are *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, translated by Walter Y. Evans-Wentz; Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's accounts; James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*; and Anagarika Govinda's three books—*The Way of White Clouds*, *The Snow Leopard*, and *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*. Alexandra David-Néel's 28 books, such as *My Journey to Lhasa*, *The Secret Oral Teaching of Tibetan Buddhist Sects*, and *The Magic of Love and Black Magic*, had an important impact on Western views of Tibet. In her famous book *With Mystic and Magicians in Tibet*, David-Néel tells an account of *delog* (one who has returned from death):

> A woman whom I met in a village of Tsarong had some years ago, remained inanimate for a whole week. She said she had been agreeably astonished by the lightness and agility of her new body and the extraordinary rapidity of its movements. She had only to wish herself in a certain place to be there immediately; she could cross rivers, walking upon the waters, or pass through walls. There was only one thing she found impossible—to cut an almost impalpable cord that attached her ethereal being to the material body which she could see perfectly well sleeping upon her couch. This cord lengthened out indefinitely but, nevertheless, it sometimes hampered her movements. She would "get caught up in it," she said.[26]

The image of Tibet constructed in the second half of the twentieth century was astonishingly vivid, a product of a combination of virtues, spirituality, and mysticism, along with rationality and historical chronicles. Tibetan Buddhist symbols of wisdom, love, and peace received widespread attention in the United States, mainly California, and gained tremendous popularity among celebrities. The Chinese occupation of Tibet attracted the attention of the Western media, which initiated a considerable pro-Tibet campaign in the 1980s and 1990s, drawing sympathy toward Tibetans and solidarity with their struggle. Tibetan issues became predominant on television screens and in movie theaters, as well as in magazines, newspapers, and eventually the Internet. The positive influence of modern images of Tibet has almost completely wiped out the ancient views held by many before the twentieth century. Tibet has been developed into a metaphor for peace, love, and wisdom; the last spiritual sanctuary on earth to escape the anxiety and monotony of the materialistic world.

The image of Tibet throughout history has been considerably affected by the religious factor. On the one hand Tibetan Buddhism has been perceived by some as cult rooted in devil worship, but on the other hand Tibetan Buddhism has been positively compared to Christianity and is a viable option of guidance for many Westerners. Tibetan Buddhism has been conceived as a divine wisdom capable to liberate the spirit from rigid restrains of Catholic doctrine. Frustrated with technology, science, and modernity while, at the same time, unable to find comfort in the dominant Western religion—Christianity—Americans have started searching for spirituality in new forms such as Buddhism. Due to the positive, spiritual connections that the Westerners have attributed to Tibetan religion, a number

of amazing, mythical images emerged, such as Shangri-La, and prevail even in modern times. A major factor that triggered the awareness of the Westerners about Tibetan Buddhism and has contributed enormously in spreading the myth of Tibet in the West is the theosophy trend that combines religion, science, and philosophy. The Theosophical Society, founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in 1875 in New York, contributed tremendously to the spread of Buddhism in the West: "Theosophy provided the prime channel through which Hinduism and Buddhism reached out to claim non-Asian supporters. Through theosophical literature, leaders, and centers, Eastern religious ideas flowed into the West."[27]

The Theosophical Society is derived from a long history of magic and spiritual teaching. Its aim is to study supernatural phenomena. Blavatsky claimed to be a Tibetan Buddhist blessed with certain spiritual powers. She also held a strong admiration for the Tibetan mahatmas, who she regarded as possessing "the greatest wisdom on earth." Blavatsky and many other theosophists perceived Tibet as a holy land inhabited by enlightened beings and hoped that Tibetans' blissful insight would illuminate the world one day: "By the end of nineteenth century, the Theosophical Society had become a global organization with about five hundred branches in more than forty countries."[28] Blavatsky's group had developed into a global phenomenon highlighting the dogma of "universal brotherhood love": "Crackpot though she may have been, Madame Blavatsky was hardly an irrelevant force. Indeed, she played a seminal role in galvanizing a Western fascination with the occult and with Tibet as the epicenter not only of an ancient spiritualism but of a future spirituality that would someday transform the world."[29] Overall, Western views of China and Tibet are complicated, unrealistic, philosophical, and superficial at the same time. Most images are constructed based on personal or religious motivations and also national projects. Racism is prevalent in the West toward anyone who does not fit in with the simple construction of what it means to be Anglo. These views are also shallow in that the changing context of time has as important an influence on perceptions as inward feelings of racism or outward nationalist views. China and Tibet have been, and will continue to be, used to make various points according to the perspective of the viewer. For some, fears of a rising China are really just outward expressions of despair during economic depression. For others, hope for Tibet is just a view perpetuated by an inward feeling of spiritual desperation. How these hopes and fears are manifested in movies is the central task of our project.

Chapter 3
The Divergence in the Portrayal of China and Tibet by Hollywood

The Yellow Peril versus the Land of Spirituality

Constructing China's Image in Hollywood: Theoretical Perspectives

Hollywood represents the American movie industry located in the city of Los Angeles, California. As a Western institution, it of course represents Western values and considerations. It should be noted that, as time has passed, Hollywood has become more global in its considerations, which we will document in later chapters. Yet perceptions of China are still filtered through a Western cultural lens. Here, our analysis of past and current projections of China by the American film industry can tell us much about Western perceptions of China and Tibet. Through this form of analysis, we can uncover much about the international system, economic politics, and cultural biases.

Theory provides a lens by which one can view the world. Here the three main conceptual lenses that guide our analysis are Orientalism, the issue-based approach, and agenda setting. Orientalism as a process will be outlined in greater detail in the next section, but first we will introduce this theory. As a theoretical perspective, it was developed in the late 1970s by Edward Said. It is related to culture, but its ramifications extend to politics and economy. Said conducted his studies according to a notion many scholars and philosophers throughout history have discussed: the power/knowledge relationship. The role of knowledge in enhancing power made knowledge a powerful tool in the hand of some states to maintain their power over less-developed states. In the postcolonial era, knowledge and knowledge construction have become the most important parameters of research in deconstructing the West/East relationship. Said works from Michel Foucault's paradigm of power relations, which states that "power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations."[1] Said engages the perspective of West/East power relations through the dominant factor of knowledge, either its representation or its communication. He explains that the West has managed to keep dominating the East by developing knowledge about the East and then utilizing that knowledge to construct an East/West relationship based on Western supremacy. In our study we will focus on the knowledge gained through Hollywood movies and the

way the production and dissemination of this knowledge affect and are affected by the relationships involving China, Tibet, and the United States.

Orientalism can be said to be a theoretical lens, but it needs more forms of analysis to move it toward the realm of genuine theory. However, as a perspective and lens through which to view the world, it remains largely acceptable until at least the rise of multiculturalism in the twenty-first century. As will be noted in this analysis, the ability to point to specific Orientalist perspectives about China was relatively easy in Hollywood at first but has declined, and by the 2000s that could be due to a shift in global politics and economy on the one hand and the advance of education and emergence of new communication technologies on the other.

The reason for the historical development of more multicultural perspectives can be gleaned from the issue-based approach.[2] Put simply, the issues on the global agenda shifted. In the past, the West dominated the political, social, and entertainment discourses, but the modern era has produced the need to be open to new cultures and perspectives, if only due to the factor of globalization. Now culture is encountered in the form of assimilation and not acculturation; cultures blend and mix to provide new perspectives rather than acculturated ones. Asian food is respected in the West, Asian religions and modes of thought are increasingly relevant, and Asian scientific advances are critical to modern development. No longer does the West simply project its image on the contact culture; instead, the two sides tend to blend and mix. As will be explained later, this process is best seen through such movies as *2012* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which respect and engage the East on somewhat equal footing. While the West is still the global hegemonic culture, this fact is declining by the minute as the East rises economically and culturally. Even if the Chinese development project stalls and they never reach global hegemony, interaction will never return to its uneven Orientalist form. In some ways, it can be said that cultural hegemony between the East and West is dead, but it remains between the Global South and North with China now becoming part of what might be considered the North.

The reason for this is that, simply, the issues on the global agenda have shifted. The issue-based approach (IBA) can help us articulate this perspective, generate theoretical predictions and policy advice, and provide a positive path forward for theoretical development. Orientalism cannot engage modern cultural contact in a concrete manner due to these developments. The IBA takes the context and salience of issues into account to determine how entities interact and when they might engage.

An issue is a source of conflict and cooperation in the international system. It is a subject, problem, or concern that has to be dealt with in either the public or private discourse, but here we confine considerations to international issues at stake between two countries or regions. How one entity feels about an issue is generally determined by timing, location, and perspectives. In the study of international relations, territorial issues can be seen to be the primary issue at the heart of international relations because they are the key for war and peace.[3] Due to either biological considerations, power politics, international prestige, economic concerns, or simple survival, the maintenance and control of territory is the issue at stake in most serious international conflicts. This finding has cleared a pathway toward a greater understanding of war and peace; in the study of global perceptions, we find that globalization and economic considerations are the primary issues of concern in the discourse between Hollywood, China, and Tibet. In the past, the main issues of concern were ideological and territorial, but this process has been surpassed by the rise of new issues that take precedence.

The region in which an issue disagreement is located is an important consideration overlooked by some. Location dynamics are clearly important in international relations because salience can, in part, be determined by location. The further an issue consideration is from the home base, the less of a concern it is. Yet proximity is no longer relevant in this age of globalization, where interactions are immediate and instantaneous. A movie produced and debuted one day in Hollywood can have its debut on the same day in China. This means that economic issues are no longer purely regional, but global in consideration.

The region in which an issue is under consideration is also important because of the longstanding rivalries and disagreements that may have been active in the region before the rise of an issue. History colors the future, and conflicts in the past will have an influence on conflicts of the future. It is impossible to understand the rise of China without its important contexts, the current post-Soviet world, an ascendant China coming after "Red China," and an economic rise occurring during one of the greatest depressions in American history—2008. Without understanding these events, it is impossible to understand the United States' permanent threat posture, the fear China imposes on the West dating back to its rise during Communism and its connection to the Cold War, and the continued fear of an American economic meltdown in which China owns America's debt.

This leads us back to timing; timing is key and connected to the region at stake. Certain regions become important during different time periods. Before the settlement of the New World, America was obviously an irrelevant territory, but that could hardly be said four hundred years later. In the past, Asia might have been irrelevant to American markets, a source of fascination and tourism but not of industry or economic advances. Now these factors are clearly linked. The technological innovations, manufacturing pace, and economic power of the Asian region make it critical for any global interaction now. Due to this situation, any issue at stake in Asia gains greater importance.

The final consideration for an issue on the agenda, and possibly the most important factor, is the salience of an issue. Generally salience of an issue means how important an issue is, or how strong the feeling for the issue is in one direction or the other. The strength of perceptions surrounding an issue is a critical consideration that cannot be overlooked. Some issues, while problematic, can generally be overlooked because they do not maintain a high level of salience in each country debating the issue. When issues are not engaged in the public agenda in a serious manner, they tend to be overlooked and passed by in the face of more serious issues. This was the problem with Tibet for many.

The salience of an issue can be developed through the agenda-setting theory indicating the role media may play in transferring the issue of salience from its agenda to the public and elites. The media play a major role in conducting the issue of salience to the public sphere and in the formation of opinion. As Maxwell McCombs explains, "Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, editors and news directors focus our attention and influence our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day…This ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda has come to be called the agenda-setting role of the news media. Establishing this salience among the public, placing an issue or topic on the public agenda so that it becomes the focus of public attention and thought—and, possibly, action—is the initial stage in the formation of public opinion."[4] In the 1990s, the media in all its forms, such as press, cinema, radio, and television, highlighted the Tibet issue; Tibet was the focus of many media reports, movies, concerts, and protests that seemed to be produced every month. Now, despite a rise in violence in Tibet since 2008, there is little notice in the

West of the plight of Tibet and its people. This is because the issue is no longer salient in the media and public discourse. How an issue becomes salient and is treated by popular culture, and what role Hollywood may play in the process of a salient issue's transfer to the public, is a prime consideration we are interested in, and the agenda setting will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

Theory is important and the foundation of any academic enterprise. Here we are guided by three theories: Orientalism, issue-based approach, and agenda setting. Orientalism is more cultural and perceptive than empirical, but the three are equally important in helping us uncover the process at work as we analyze the key questions in this book: How has Hollywood treated Asia, and how have perceptions changed through time? At first, Orientalism dominated, but now the issues on the global agenda have shifted, and in the twenty-first century, economics is the master of all domains.

China in Hollywood Movies: Orientalism and Yellow Peril

The West has for a long time perceived Asia, and China in particular, as having an idolater and barbarian culture due to cultural and religious differences. Therefore, the West sent priests and missionaries to enlighten the people of the Far East by spreading Christianity's teachings and Western norms and culture. The West-Asia relationship framed in the context of superior/inferior relations is the theme of Edward Said's *Orientalism*: "The essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen—in the West—to be one between a strong and a weak partner…The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal.'"[5] The twentieth century has brought about many technological advances that, when merged with cultural policy, reflect patterns of perceptions and action. Instead of sending missionaries as in the past, the West just makes a movie to push its dominant perspective. Instead of sending a cultural ambassador, the West sends Mickey Mouse and Captain America. What is interesting is how these perspectives in the West have adapted and morphed through history. What aspects of the cultural hegemony have changed through time and which have not?

In the twentieth century, Hollywood played a significant role in circulating different images of China in the West through movies. On one hand, it mirrored the American and Western perceptions of China. On the other hand, it created, via its skillful artists—producers, filmmakers, actors, and scriptwriters—diverse images of China that were highly accepted by the Western society. Few Hollywood movies, such as *Empire of the Sun* and *The Good Earth*, are touching and sensitive, while the majority, such as *Red Corner* and the Fu Manchu movies, are disrespectful and outright racist.

Entertainment and cultural products could be better studied in relation to Orientalism. Said's work was influential in many fields. He argues that Orientalism is a system of governing the Orient. The use of culturally biased terms, views, and perspectives is a way of managing the relationship in ways favorable to the outsiders, the West: "After Said, then, to label a text as 'orientalist' is to imply that it is culturally biased, trafficking in stereotypes of sensuality, decadence, and weakness."[6] Therefore, Hollywood's movies holding negative and even positive images of China and the Chinese people can be labeled as "Orientalist" because their depiction of China is biased, racist, and stereotyped in most occasions.

Elaine Kim states in her book that "caricatures of Asians have been part of American popular culture for generations. The power-hungry despot, the helpless heathen, the sensuous dragon lady, the

comical loyal servant, and the pudgy, de-sexed detective who talks about Confucius are all part of the standard American image of the Asian."[7] These perspectives are obviously Orientalist in nature. Orientalist views are evident in Hollywood movies where caricatures of Asians are clearly revealed. For some, the most dangerous representation of the Chinese is that of faceless masses deprived of any identity, individual agency, or ethnic background. Decades ago, traces of Orientalism were manifested in the way Hollywood approached Chinese roles and actors by blurring their characteristics. White actors played the leading Chinese roles for a long time, and even after the Chinese were allowed to play some roles, they were muddled up with Japanese or other Asian characters: a Chinese actor, for instance, would play the role of a Japanese character and vice versa.

Hollywood's representation of Asia in general and China, specifically, has been largely linked to the idea of the Yellow Peril that was widely spread in the first half of the twentieth century in various Western countries, mainly Britain and the United States. Yellow Peril is a metaphor for the danger that the Asian races impose on Western civilization. Its historical roots date back seven hundred years ago to the Mongol invasion, under the leadership of Genghis Khan, of several Western countries, such as Poland, Silesia, and Hungary. The modern form of Yellow Peril reconstitutes the ancient fear of the invasion of Asian cultures in modern times through immigration and diaspora: "Picture the Golden Horde: vicious, demonic peoples whose way of life is utterly foreign, who seem to have inhuman courage and endurance, who do not feel pain, who know nothing of the rules of war and do not take prisoners, who rape and pillage, who are invincible and unstoppable. Hold on to this image, as we now need to take it in its entirety and transpose it onto nineteenth-century America, where the idea of the Yellow Peril once again took root in Western society."[8] The Yellow Peril was strongly reinforced in American culture in the middle of the nineteenth century due to the migration of Chinese that increased dramatically after 1852. Thousands of Chinese moved to America to work in the gold mines, and many of them stayed long term. Some Californians saw the incursions of the Chinese as a threat to the state. During a time when the United States had many issues with African, Hispanic, and German ethnic groups, the Chinese were added to the list of those thought to threaten American culture. After being replaced by Chinese laborers, the Irish further intensified the Yellow Peril concept by promoting white racism and calling for the Irish and Anglo-Saxon people to stand together in front of the "black" and "yellow" races.

The threat of the Chinese to the working classes remained a powerful theme through the first half of the twentieth century. The Yellow Peril penetrated to the media when the popular press was used to warn Americans of the dangers of the yellow race. The Chinese were portrayed as simultaneously planning to take over America and destroy Christianity and the white civilization. Many magazines and newspapers published cartoons generating xenophobia by depicting Asian people, mainly Chinese and Japanese, as barbarians attacking America or as subhuman immigrants aiming to take jobs from whites.[9] These views were reinforced even further with the onset of World War II and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Even though the Chinese were American allies and also fighting the Japanese, these two groups were lumped together unfairly.

The Yellow Peril became a central theme in major Hollywood productions where the Chinese are portrayed in a very negative light. The Chinese man is usually depicted as a criminal or rapist while the Chinese woman is represented as submissive, seductive, and a sex object with nefarious intentions. Moreover, the Yellow Peril is revealed through movies that involve violence, brainwashing, torture, rape, captivity, and seduction being central objects of obsession for the Asian

characters. These storylines of hostility against the Chinese are better understood in their historical, cultural, social, and ideological context; the rape of the white woman by the Chinese villain implies the rape of white society by the evil forces of the yellow race, the seduction the Chinese woman uses to manipulate the white man refers to the seduction of Chinese eroticism that makes the white man turn his back to Christian civilization, and the captivity of the white woman expresses the fears of interracial marriage, mainly between an American woman and a Chinese Man, where the white woman is integrated into Chinese society.[10] Yet providing context does not lessen the problematic themes introduced by Hollywood images that became enduring compared to those images produced by the media. We have a long history of films to consult to see racism in action and, unfortunately, this long history colors present international interaction.

Favorable images of China appeared in a very modest number of Hollywood movies, yet some of them were influential, such as *The Good Earth* and the Bruce Lee movies. Negative images of China, conversely, were revealed in a more significant number of Hollywood movies such as *The Yellow Menace* (1916), *The City of Dim Faces* (1918), *The Perils of Pauline* (1919), *The Red Lantern* (1919), *Crooked Streets* (1920), *Toll of the Sea* (1922), *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), *Freaky Friday* (1976), *The Last Emperor* (1987), *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997), and *Red Corner* (1997), along with many other Hollywood movies released throughout the twentieth century. The most remarkable are the Lady Dragon movies and Chinatown movies such as *Chinatown Villains* (1916), *Chinatown Nights* (1929), *Captured in Chinatown* (1935), *Shadow of Chinatown* (1936), and *Chinatown* (1974). There also appeared many movies centered on evil Chinese characters such as the Emperor Ming character, featured mainly in *Flash Gordon* science fiction serials. Yet the most influential Hollywood productions that capture the strongest Orientalist traits and personify the Yellow Peril theme are the movies based on the character of Fu Manchu.

The Mask of Fu Manchu

The antagonist in Fu Manchu movies is a genius, a villain, and a "Chinaman" with an insane dream to conquer the world. The Fu Manchu character embodies the totality of Western xenophobic fears. Fu Manchu is a master of Asian tricks and black magic powers, possesses Western knowledge and technology, and has the ability to mobilize millions of hordes of Asian soldiers. He uses all his skills and might to overpower the West, destroy the white race, and put an end to Christianity. Fu Manchu was introduced to the Western public through the novels of the English writer Sax Rohmer. An accurate summary of Dr. Fu Manchu is provided in Rohmer's first novel *The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu*:

> Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present, with all the resources, if you will, of a wealthy government —which, however, already has denied all knowledge of his existence. Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.[11]

Fu Manchu was first brought to the screen in the 1923 British film serial *The Mystery of Dr. Fu Manchu*. His first appearance in the United States was in the 1929 film *The Mysterious Dr. Fu*. The Chinese villain character penetrated American pop culture and was featured extensively in screen, broadcast, and press media for more than ninety years. Fu Manchu appeared in a number of Hollywood movies released between 1930 and 1980 such as *The Return of Dr. Fu Manchu* (1930), *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), *Drums of Fu Manchu* (1940), *The Face of Fu Manchu* (1965), *The Brides of Fu Manchu* (1966), *The Vengeance of Fu Manchu* (1967), *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (1968), *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (1969), and *The Fiendish Plot of Dr. Fu Manchu* (1980). Nevertheless, the most remarkable and popular movie featuring the malicious doctor is *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932), starring Boris Karloff and Myrna Loy.

The Mask of Fu Manchu is one of many adventures of vicious Dr. Fu Manchu in his never-ending attempts to conquer the world. The movie opens with Nayland Smith of British Secret Service appointing Sir Lionel Barton to lead an expedition to the Gobi Desert—one of the world's great deserts located in south Mongolia—in search of Genghis Khan's tomb to bring the golden mask and scimitar of the legendary Mongol emperor back to Britain. Sir Lionel is kidnapped, yet the expedition continuous under the leadership of Nayland Smith accompanied by Sheila, Sir Lionel's daughter, and her lover Terry. Once in Mongolia, a series of catastrophic events takes place, and we witness a chain of violent actions such as kidnapping, torturing, hypnotizing, and even murder that Dr Fu Manchu uses against the white people. However, the movie ends with the victory of the British team, who succeed to defeat the evil Fu Manchu and save the world from the "yellow" hordes.

The Mask of Fu Manchu endorses Orientalist notions by reflecting the superiority of the West over the East. The West is strong, patriotic, rational, virtuous, and mature. The East is inferior, irrational, depraved, subhuman, naïve, and exotic. Thus the West has the obligation to conquer Asia and destroy its voluminous hordes through pure moral and intellectual will alone. These controversial images are strongly revealed in the opening scene in the course of the conversation between Nayland Smith and Sir Lionel Barton.

NAYLAND SMITH: Well, Lionel, before we go into that, I want to ask you a funny question. Do you love your country?

SIR LIONEL BARTON: Oh, yes. All through the war and the depression and the high taxes and the low rents, I shall never love another.

NAYLAND SMITH: Well, the British government is asking you to risk your life again.

SIR LIONEL BARTON: Oh very well.

NAYLAND SMITH: After you leave here, you're going to the British Museum to meet some friends of yours. You are going to ask them to join you in an expedition to go to the edge of the Gobi Desert and hunt for the lost and buried tomb of Genghis Khan.

[The conversation progresses from exposing the virtues of the West to pinpointing the divergence of values between Asia and the West.]

NAYLAND SMITH: You know Fu Manchu?

SIR LIONEL BARTON: Yes.

NAYLAND SMITH: He is trying to find it too.

SIR LIONEL BARTON: Oh, I didn't know he was an archaeologist.

NAYLAND SMITH: Oh no. He is insane for power.

SIR LIONEL BARTON: What do you expect to find in this tomb? Records, the golden plate with the threat of Genghis Khan to return, the golden mask he wore, and the famous golden scimitar?

NAYLAND SMITH: Exactly. Of course in your hands, these things will be merely interesting archaeological specimens to go into the British Museum. But should Fu Manchu put that mask across his wicked eyes and take that scimitar into his bony, cruel hands, all Asia rises. He'll declare himself Genghis Khan come to life again, and he'll lead hundreds of millions of men to sweep the world, and that my friend is what you have got to prevent. You must find that grave. You must be the first to find it, and you must bring those pretty things back to England.

The Mask of Fu Manchu personifies the Yellow Peril phenomenon; it reflects and deepens Western images of China as a real and enormous danger to the West. Fu Manchu is a genius, yet hundreds of millions in China and Asia are ignorant and childlike, easily believing his tricks and willing to follow him in his devastating war. The Western xenophobia originating from the medieval ages and being perpetuated by the illusion of a Mongol emperor leading the yellow hordes in an insane war against the West is represented throughout the movie and is best symbolized in the vision of Fah Lo See, Fu Manchu's daughter.

FAH LO SEE: I have seen a vision. The prophecy is about to be fulfilled. Genghis Khan, masked in his plate of gold, bearing the scimitar that none but he could ever wield comes back to us. I've seen a vision of countless hordes swarming to recapture the world. I've seen the victorious. I've heard the shouts of the dead and the dying drowned by the victorious cries of our people, Genghis Khan comes back. Genghis Khan leads the East against the world.

The Mask of Fu Manchu conveys a fight that surpasses its contextual place and time to become universal and everlasting. The movie embodies all the fears the West has of the East but also the confidence with which it will overcome these challenges that still remain. The struggle is given broader dimensions to become a struggle between Christianity represented by the West and Satan represented by the East. Fu Manchu's first visual appearance was a close-up picture of his face and its distorted reflection in a big oval mirror giving the audience a strong impression of being the face of Satan. Moreover, the identity of this Satan is well revealed throughout the film as being the Chinaman. The war that China/Satan is leading against West/Christianity is represented in different scenes, and the most impressive is the one where Fu Manchu is addressing Sheila and Dr. Von Berg as soon as they are held captive by his slaves.

FU MANCHU: You, Miss Barton, will be taken to the room of the golden peacock, where you will be prepared for a sacrifice to our gods. And you…you, my dear doctor, will follow my slaves to the room of the slim silver fingers…And at the sunrise tomorrow, as my chieftains are assembled in the temple below, you two and your patriot, Sir Nayland Smith, will have the pleasure of entering your Christian heaven together. It will be your honor to be the first white martyrs to perish at the hand of the new Genghis Khan.

The diabolical figure of Fu Manchu has its reversed image in Hollywood Charlie Chan movies; however, the Hollywood Charlie Chan movies continue the Orientalist view of the Asian characters in the West. Charlie Chan is a fictional Chinese American hero. He is a clever, skilled, and honest detective in the Honolulu Police Department who makes use of logic and classical methods in solving crimes. Charlie Chan is featured in a number of books, radio shows, games, TV series, and more than fifty films. However, Charlie Chan movies were accused of being racist and stereotypical for several reasons. In most of the movies, Chan is played successively by three different white actors with a yellow face. Yet, despite his favorable character, Charlie Chan holds traits commonly attributed to Asian men: he is impassive, effeminate, sexless, and unattractive. Finally, Charlie Chan continues the notion that the East is a threat to the American society through his very big family of 11 children. The idea is that his fertile nature will eventually produce an internal Asian horde bent on conquest.[12]

Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan represent conflicting interpretations of the Chinese people, yet they are racist and stereotypical. Both are the creation of the Western egocentrism and fail to expose the main positive traits of the Chinese culture and the potential of being recognized in the West. As Sandra Hawley points out in her essay "The Importance of Being Charlie Chan," "One could argue endlessly whether a somewhat favorable stereotype is in the long run more or less harmful than a totally negative stereotype, but the argument is pointless. Both stereotypes are dangerous because they distract from reality, substitute slogans of understanding, furnish a comfortable illusion of knowledge when ignorance is the case, and mitigate against efforts at genuine understanding."[13]

The Last Emperor

The Last Emperor is considered to be another movie holding Orientalist views of China. A fascinating Columbia Picture production, the film was at first funded privately, and this might explain the more nuanced approach to China. It is based partially on *From Emperor to Citizen*, the autobiography of Pu Yi—China's last emperor—and covers a sixty-year period in Chinese history witnessing the collapse of the Qing dynasty, the founding and downfall of the Republic of China, and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Bernardo Bertolucci's masterpiece, starring John Lone, Joan Chen, Peter O'Toole, Ying Ruocheng, Victor Wong, Dennis Dun, and Ryuichi Sakamoto, was released in 1987 and won nine Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Art Decoration, Best Cinematography, Best Costume Design, Best Film Editing, Best Music, Best Sound, and Best Screenplay. The film was shot mainly in the Forbidden City and other parts of China with the collaboration of the PRC government, which was the first time this was allowed for a Hollywood production.

The Last Emperor opens with Pu Yi's arrival in the People's Republic of China as a traitor having committed shameful deeds against his country and people. In prison Pu Yi tries to commit suicide, but is rescued at the last minute. The movie integrates flashbacks of the past life of the emperor with his present time in the reeducation camp, during which he writes his memoirs. We first see the three-year-old Pu Yi being separated from his family and loving mother, brought to the Forbidden City, and crowned emperor. The child becomes the pampered head of the Qing dynasty; he enjoys absolute freedom, and is served by an army of eunuchs, yet he is not allowed to leave the Forbidden City.

Pu Yi's life starts to gain a new meaning with the arrival of a tutor from Scotland who provides positive support to the young emperor. Unfortunately, the Western teacher fails to achieve his goal of

helping Pu Yi take control of his own life and free himself from the prison that took different forms in successive historical events. In 1912, China is declared a republic; therefore, Pu Yi is forced to resign, yet he remains in the Forbidden City. Pu Yi starts several reforms and tries to clear the palace of the eunuchs' corruption. Meanwhile, he marries a Manchu descendant, Wan Jung, who lives with him in the Forbidden City until the government of the Republic of China exiles them. Later, he arrives in Manchuria to become the puppet emperor for the Japanese militant government; he signs documents that support the Japanese repressive military activities. As the Russians invade China, they take Pu Yi as prisoner and hand him over to Mao's government. Pu Yi is released after serving ten years in the Communist prison. For the first time in his life, he is free. Pu Yi is employed by the state as a gardener, and before he dies, he makes a final visit to the Forbidden City as a common Chinese citizen.

The Last Emperor is considered by some to be problematic. It is emblematic of the typical Western perspective of China in that it shows the viciousness, corruption, eroticism, violence, and ignorance of the Chinese empire at the time. This narrative also fits with the needs of the current Communist leaders in that it displays the inability of pre-Communist China to maintain its own rule and the failures of the decadent past. "The problem is that in creating another film about surface spectacle and Orientalism, Bertolucci feeds into some dangerous myths about China. Perhaps the epic, the spectacular Hollywood historical film, may be characterized as a representation of a power struggle, usually an essentialist Manichean struggle for some kind of empire, some kind of hegemony—a battle of ideologies. In lavish Hollywood spectacles like those of DeMille, there are usually implicit or explicit struggles between East and West, the barbaric versus the civilized, with the civilized always winning at the end."[14] The differences between the West and East are strongly reinforced in the movie with the arrival of the English tutor to the palace. At his first appearance, Mr. Reginald Johnston starts introducing the Western civilization to the barbarian Chinese. Mr. Johnson teaches the emperor the importance of Western values and analysis.

EMPEROR PU YI: Why are words important?

MR. JOHNSTON: If you cannot say what you mean, Your Majesty…you will never mean what you say. And a gentleman should always mean what he says.

EMPEROR PU YI: Ah yes! A gentleman. Are you a gentleman?

MR. JOHNSTON: I would like to be a gentleman, Your Majesty. I try to be.

EMPEROR PU YI: I am not a gentleman. I'm not allowed to say what I mean. They are always telling me what to say.

Bertolucci's movie relies on the old tropes about China and the Chinese. The man of honor, knowledge, and authority tries throughout the movie to open the emperor's eyes to the truth. At the beginning of the movie, we hear Pu Yi frequently repeating, "I don't understand." Johnston is the one who explains to Pu Yi that he is no longer the emperor, and he also points out the corruption in the dynasty and encourages the emperor to make reforms. Johnston suggests that Pu Yi wear spectacles to fix his nearsightedness, suggesting the power of Western science over Chinese backwardness. Johnston's intention is to reconstruct Pu Yi's mind and soul so he will be able to see life from a different perspective based on knowledge and human values. The balance between seeing and

knowing, rooted in the ancient Greeks, is well established in Western culture. Moreover, Johnston brings Pu Yi a bicycle as a further step to introduce him to the modern world, whose basic foundations are freedom, human rights, and technological development as represented by the bicycle. The brilliance of *The Last Emperor* is that it is more nuanced than past approaches in dealing with the relation between the Western tutor and the Chinese emperor. While the Westerner brings technology to the East, this is a historical reality and not a heavy-handed stereotype so often used in the past.

The movie represents China through a remarkable aesthetic tableau holding dreamlike richness.

The Western viewer is confronted with gorgeous, extravagant, and exotic architecture, costumes, customs, dances, ceremonies, rituals, and practices. However, the visual splendor that Bertolucci strengthens throughout the movie has been exploited to further alienate China and its emperor. The gigantic, fascinating kowtowing crowd scenes emphasize the ideology of conformity and collectivism over democracy and individualism, drawing a dark image of China as inferior, backward, and uncivilized in comparison to the West.

One of the movie's most impressive scenes is that of Pu Yi's coronation, showing the three-year-old emperor stepping down from the dragon throne and heading toward the huge door. As he gets through the enormous, yellow, waving curtain, the camera turns to capture an astonishing view: thousands of aristocrats, landlords, mandarins, and eunuchs, all dressed in rich, fabulous, traditional costumes, lined up in geometric precision and harmony and stretched along the Forbidden City as far as the eye can see. As soon as the emperor appears, the countless crowds kowtow to him; the scene, with all its veneration, holiness, and significance, has turned into a mockery by the bizarre look and behavior of the little emperor wearing a costume too big for him and wandering indifferently among endless ranks of nobles, guards, and servants. Bertolucci suggests that the Chinese are childlike in worshipping anyone that is set before them as emperor, even a spoiled, ridiculous little child; he promotes an ethnocentric attitude of the superficial East: "The West has traditionally thought of itself as the site of substance and the Orient as one of surface; the fetishism of the film for dazzling silks, brocades, and embroidery still promotes an attitude that, after all, underneath the Orient's silky sleeves there is nothing there."[15]

The spectacle of *The Last Emperor* is that of a fairy tale out of the imagination; however, the characters, mainly the emperor, resemble beings from another world. The last emperor of China fails to develop into a true human being in the movie even though he vaguely experiences a cycle of growth and quasi redemption. Pu Yi appears to be nothing more than a puppet controlled by different Chinese regimes and Japanese forces for political and financial gain. He has been worshipped, manipulated, pampered, isolated, humiliated, crowned, overthrown, exiled, betrayed, tortured, imprisoned, and finally set free, all through little intervention of his own design. Pu Yi's weird, cruel, indifferent attitudes and behaviors made him into a subhuman character with a twisted mind and sense of personhood. We see Pu Yi ordering the servant to drink ink, breast-feeding at the age of ten, making love to both of his wives, and joining the Japanese in their conspiracy against his own people. The "Sun of Heaven," "Lord of Ten Thousand Years," and master of the most populous nation on earth is reduced in the Bertolucci picture to an empty character deprived of any common feelings and awareness. The trait of worthlessness that outlines Pu Yi's character is mostly revealed in the scene where, after being ordered by the Communist reformers to write his memoirs, he stares at the white pages of the notebook. The blankness of the pages symbolizes the emptiness of Pu Yi's life and

mind.[16] It is no wonder that the Communist Chinese government supported the film even though it creates an unrealistic image of China. A destructive picture of the last emperor shows the need of imperial China to radically change, which makes the Communist Party a much better alternative to imperial regime. It also provides reasonable justification for party policies and shows the necessity of the severe measures the party has taken to ensure a successful implementation of its strategy and plans. To recuperate the great damage of the last emperor and imperial regime, the Chinese government and people needed to make a lot of effort and sacrifices.

The Last Emperor's depiction of Pu Yi as a "spectator" rather than a real person is to a large degree exaggerated. It's a reflection of the modern take on the concept of an emperor or absolute ruler. Those in the West seek to demystify the concept and the make the man humble. Those in the East wish to move on from their past. In the interview published in *Bertolucci's The Last Emperor: Multiple Takes*, Spitz wonders if Bertolucci feels it matters at all that things be right historically. Bertolucci responds "I think my tendency is to be more accurate when the movies are completely fantasy and to be more free when the movie is more historical. This is because I am a naughty child."[17]

Bertolucci seeks from the beginning of the movie to mix fantasy with history in an audacious combination. The movie opens with Pu Yi's suicide attempt scene, which has a strong influence in the development of Pu Yi's character in the Western imagination; however, this scene is inaccurate and is the pure invention of Bertolucci's imagination. The accuracy of Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* has raised a debate among some scholars and critics. It is difficult to neglect the artistic, ideological, and psychological context through which the life of Pu Yi has been represented in film. Did Bertolucci ever feel he was making a film about a real character, or was he making a film about a past, ideology, and process that never existed and likely never will exist again? Bonnie Kaufman, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, where she chairs a study group on psychoanalysis and film, states, "Bertolucci has never tried to place the real Pu Yi within our grasp; instead, he has used the idea of the last emperor as the center of a cinematic fantasy. Within this story of one ordinary man's extraordinary life, the filmmaker has inscribed his vision of the intricate relations between art, ideology and psychic experience."[18]

The Last Emperor draws a dark image of China despite the positive changes in Pu Yi's life that take place at the end of the movie. Pu Yi is released from the Communist prison, and for the first time he emerges as a true human being, according to the film's perspective. However, everything else in China—system and people—remains the same.

Throughout the movie the Western viewer is exposed to offensive scenes portraying the imperial regime as oppressive and cruel while forcing the people to submit to a rigid ideology. The Chinese people's real worth is linked to how effectively they serve the emperor. Bertolucci has successfully represented the Chinese existence as an extension of the emperor in the escape scene where the eunuchs make with their bodies a huge chain that stretches all over the roofs of the palace to save the emperor's life. Another scene that portrays their barbaric practices and repulsive devotion to the emperor is the breast-feeding test that takes place in the Forbidden City to choose the wet nurse; we see an old, weird, perverted servant squeezing women's breasts to test their milk abundance, which resembles to a great extent the squeezing of cows' nipples. In the West, breast-feeding at a late age represents psychoses and immaturity leading to deviance at a later age.

The movie ends the same way it starts as the prison governor, who manages to liberate Pu Yi from

the past and turn him into a better human being, is humiliated and forced to kowtow and worship Chairman Mao. Even the liberator is subjected to domination. In the course of the movie, the Chinese regime has witnessed dramatic changes—feudalism to republic to Communism—yet it has retained its essential authoritarian and backward nature. The characters might progress in minor ways, but the country as a whole does not, even though it experienced revolutionary changes in the real world. While being respectful of certain Chinese traditions, the film still retains its essential criticism of Chinese society despite signs of internal progress. Hollywood reflects Western society's perceptions and politics even if the film is made by principled and remarkable auteur. Hollywood and the West cannot hide their true agenda through beauty and drama. *The Last Emperor* explains more about Western visions and perceptions than Chinese history and process.

The Good Earth

A few Hollywood movies holding a more favorable image of China and the Chinese people appeared at different stages of the twentieth century. The list of these types of movies is short by political necessity. It was difficult to make a movie favorable to China in the climate of racism before 1950 and post-Communist takeover after 1950. The most remarkable film among those rare ones showing sympathy for China is *The Good Earth* for its quality, breadth, and use of source material.

The Good Earth is an adaptation of Pearl Buck's bestselling novel of the same name published in 1932. The novel, awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the Howells Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, gained widespread success in the first half of the twentieth century; it has since been translated into 145 languages. In the United States, the novel is included in high school literary curriculum.

Buck, daughter of American missionaries, was raised in China. She returned to America to proceed with her university studies. Soon after she got back to China she married John Buck, an American agricultural economist who wrote two valuable books, *Chinese Farm Economy* and *Land Utilization in China*. John Buck spent around thirty years in China and used to teach advanced farming methods to the Chinese. Living in the rural areas of China for several years provided Pearl Buck the opportunity to get acquainted with the farmers' way of life. She has always considered her development that of belonging to two different cultures—American and Chinese. Buck was awarded the 1938 Nobel Prize in literature for her trilogy works, which included *The Good Earth* and the twin biographies of her missionary parents, *The Exile* and *Fighting Angel*, both published in 1936.

The Good Earth movie adaptation is considered one of the most expensive productions of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) studio in the 1930s. It is a blockbuster that attracted, according to MGM studio estimations in 1955, 65 million people worldwide to movie theaters. *The Good Earth*, set in China and entirely about Chinese farmers, was shot over San Fernando Valley and starred two Anglo actors, Paul Muni as Wang Lung and Luise Rainer as O-Lan. The movie, directed by Sidney Franklin, won two Academy Awards for Best Cinematography and Best Actress. It was also nominated for Best Director, Best Film Editing, and Best Picture.

The Good Earth opens on Wang Lung's wedding day. So happy and excited, the young Chinese farmer takes a bath and heads to the Great House to pick up his bride O-Lan, who has been a slave there for many years. The arranged marriage of Wang Lung and O-Lan comes off well. O-Lan works side by side with her husband in the fields and gives birth to two sons and a daughter. Wang Lung

buys more land and succeeds in achieving a modest prosperity.

Wang Lung's family lives peacefully and contentedly until one day the harvest is ruined due to a drought that causes famine in the region. The family undergoes misfortune and ethical crisis. O-Lan kills her newborn child to save her from suffering and teaches her children to steal and beg to survive the famine. Wang Lung cringes at the wealth of the nobles and Chinese aristocrats. He witnesses the protests of the poor and oppressed people. Soon, the Republicans overthrow the imperial regime and take power, causing total chaos in the streets. One day O-Lan joins the hungry crowds raiding a rich man's house, yet she faints after being trampled on by the masses. As she wakes up she finds a bag of jewels. This fortune allows the farmer's family to return to its land and prosper again.

The harvest is abundant, and Wang Lung buys more lands as well as the Great House. Wang Lung, corrupted by money, loses interest in the land and carries out an extravagant luxurious life. He gets obsessed with Lotus, a young dancer, and takes her as a second wife. Soon after, Lotus and the Lung's youngest son start an affair. As Wang Lung finds out about their secret relationship, he asks his son to leave the house. At the time the son is leaving, a swarm of locusts fills the air and threatens the whole village. To save the lands, Wang Lung uses the strategy of his eldest son, who went to college and acquired advanced techniques in agriculture. All the farmers unite to save the crops, and at the right moment the wind shifts direction, taking the locusts away. Wang Lung, experiencing a conscious awakening, forgives his young son, sells the Great House, and returns to the land and to his wife, whom he has neglected for a long time.

The movie closes with the wedding day of Wang's younger son; however, the son's wedding is utterly different from the father's wedding. Wang Lung organizes a very big celebration for the occasion, and the whole village is invited—nobles and farmers. O-Lan is watching from her room, where she lies in a very luxurious bed surrounded by several slaves. On the wedding night, O-Lan dies exhausted from the hard life she experienced but satisfied with the turn of events.

The Good Earth replaces the unassimilable "yellow horde" with real, brave, and humble people with realistic problems that follow typical themes of redemption and progress. It reflects China's historical, cultural, and social background in a simple and common way reachable by the American public. The movie carefully depicts Chinese customs, habits, food, costumes, work, religion, and superstitions.

The movie also introduces Chinese farmers to the West through the example of Lung's family. Lung, a simple, poor farmer, experiences a chain of joyful and tragic events, yet he manages to overcome the economic crisis and erotic temptations to reach prosperity and family stability. He discovers at the end of the movie the virtue of the land and the "good earth." O-Lan, once a slave at the Great House, becomes Wang Lung's wife and helps her husband in the fields and offers him valuable advice to rise above difficulties. She is also a proud mother who works hard to provide her family a good standard of living. The movie projects a more favorable image of Chinese as hard working, land loving, and industrious people, not bent on world conquest but rather the basic needs of every family throughout the world.

The Good Earth shows a great compassion for the Chinese people, yet it still holds some offensive attitudes toward China. Even though Buck was raised in two cultures, some of the attitudes in the book and certainly the attitudes exhibited in the movie represent ethnocentric views. The movie holds strong stereotyped views of Chinese people frequently portrayed as dirty, diseased, corrupted, backward, and ridiculous. The movie opens with Lung and O-Lan's wedding, yet the major event that

the filmmaker highlights with several scenes in this introductory part is Lung's shower—starting with the preparations for the shower to the after-shower—implying by that the dirtiness of a society where people clean their body on important occasions and, at a step further, where the cleaning of the body equals in importance the initial occasion.

Moreover, the woman in *The Good Earth* as represented by the character of O-Lan is denied her rights as a person, a wife, a daughter, and a mother. The true value of a woman is not measured according to humanistic means, such as behavior, emotions, intellectual capacities, or even physical appearance, but rather according to her productivity in bearing children and serving the man. The coldness of O-Lan's character and the context in which she is framed has prevented the viewers from seeing her emerge as a true woman, wife, and mother. O-Lan's happiness is not achieved through her love to her husband and children but rather through the success she achieves while performing well the role of the wife as dictated by the society. What is a wife? What is the task she has to fulfill in life? The answer is verbalized in the conversation between Lung and his father before meeting his future wife.

LUNG: Do you think she would be an ugly woman?
FATHER: If things go on like this the bridegrooms will ask to see the brides before marrying them.
LUNG: I won't have a pockmarked woman.
FATHER: Are you a farmer's son or not? A woman must work as your mother did and bear children as she did six sons.

The opposite of O-Lan in the movie is Lotus, who represents another type of Chinese woman but always with no human characteristics. Lotus serves man's physical needs and stands as a sex object. Another negative aspect of Chinese society the movie depicts carefully is the issue of slavery of women. The movie conveys slavery in its different forms and manifestations. Hollywood entities were determined to powerfully enhance this idea by the excessive repetition of the world slave, but they backed away and deleted the word from most of the original movie after they received strong objection from the Chinese officials who showed great dissatisfaction for the improper use of the term: "The word 'slave' was used twenty times in the early version of the film. After the Chinese protest, MGM told the Chinese that they made 18 cuts to delete that word, but saved its use in two places where deletion would cause problems for the overall structural integrity."[19]

The movie fails to grasp the major transformation that China went through in moving from empire to republic. The issue of slavery in the movie is a good example indicating that China remains the same under different political systems. Speculations may be raised about the intention of *The Good Earth* writers and filmmakers in stressing slavery, a theme so offending and humiliating to Chinese people and government at a time when slavery was abolished in China and serious steps were taken by the republic government to fight practicing it: "The Qing government had outlawed public and private slavery in 1910, but only after the establishment of the Republic in 1911 did action begin to match legislation. Homes such as the Home for Runaway Slaves in Yunnan-fu were established by various provincial governments. The Republican Government introduced further laws against the sale of women and children in the Penal Code of 1928."[20] Once again, a film fails to match reality in favor of a good story and the ethnocentrism of the writer and filmmaker.

The Good Earth portrays the Chinese system as evil, deceitful, and corrupt. The social, cultural, economic, political, and religious parameters of the Chinese community effectively destroy the goodness and moral values of the people; even O-Lan—the righteous Chinese woman, the loyal wife, and the good mother—has to kill her newborn baby girl due to starvation, and Wang Lung—the thoughtful father and caring husband—falls victim to eroticism and gets married a second time to a prostitute. The movie exposes China's moral decadence, social corruption, and cruel political system where matters such as slavery, gender abuse, famine, revolution, and mass execution prevail. The Chinese felt offended by the way they were represented in the movie because such images were used for colonial justifications. The idea was that, while the Chinese are good people in general, there are systemic abuses that can only be solved through Western knowledge, institutions, and practices. The fight against the locusts is indicative of this view and the need for modernity in a culture so backward.

The Good Earth raised a strong debate among intellectuals. While some critics saw the positive aspect of the book and movie for raising awareness about China and contributing to the understanding of the Chinese peasants and their way of life, others (mainly Chinese critics) protested Buck's story for being biased and partial in portraying China. Their general point was that Buck focused on the underclass of workers and slaves within China thus ignoring the special achievements of the Chinese. This focus on the negative aspects of underclass and the great exaggeration in depicting these aspects made the unnatural and strange the center of representations of China in the West.[21]

It is worth mentioning here that the frustration with *The Good Earth* movie has been brought up in a remarkable novel for children, *Donald Duk*, written by the American writer Frank Chin. *Donald Duk* deals with the identity crisis of a Chinese American boy. In the course of the story, the Duk father who owns a restaurant says, "I only wish Pearl Buck was alive and walk into my restaurant so I can cut out her heart and liver."[22] This sentence has been quoted in several academic publications dealing with issues related to the representations of Asians in America; Charles Hayford, scholar and university professor whose field of interests is Chinese history and US-China relations, highlights the Duk sentence in his essay *What's So Bad about The Good Earth?*

Even a movie like *The Good Earth*, thought to be universally positive, retains strong Orientalist views. When best intentioned, Hollywood still gets the course of Chinese life wrong and projects the worst of the society.

Tibet in Hollywood Movies: Spirituality and Myth

Hollywood has for decades been captivated by Tibetan myths and fantasy. American production companies and filmmakers, falling prey to the seduction of magic that started with Marco Polo and reached its peak with Blavatsky's theosophy, mysticism, and spiritualism, projected skillfully their fantasies about Tibet and its religion through a number of movies that attracted millions of people to the theaters in the United States and abroad. Hollywood created its own version of Tibet where poverty, savagery, hostility, disease, feudalism, and serfdom had been disregarded to give way to a largely positive image of Tibet where love, peace, joy, and spirituality prevail. Tibet's utopia becomes a global icon infiltrating the public consciousness in this process. Moreover, Hollywood introduced Tibetan Buddhism with all its divine, peaceful, enchanting, and colorful images to a materialistic world where greed, monotony, and cruelty triumph. Through its studio system,

fascinating costumes, heavenly music, dreamlike pictures, and distinguished stars, Hollywood skillfully brought the lamas' serenity to the anxious and distressed heart of the Westerners. Tibet has civilized the West in certain respects without being civilized itself.

Hollywood movies try to draw a unique, positively unrealistic relationship between Tibet, Buddhism, and Christianity. This relationship was reflected in works of some scholars and Jesuits and gained importance mainly during the last century: "Some European scholars and Jesuits have sought close connections with Tibet, thus identified as an early place for Christianity's influence and prosperity. The idea of Jesus travelling to Tibet was also largely spread and extensively discussed through the last century. Nicolas Notovitch, a Russian Jew converted to Greek Orthodoxy, claimed that he acquired a copy of a sacred book mentioning Jesus visiting Tibet and Lhasa, and gave a translation and an analysis of the texts in *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, first published in 1894 and reprinted in 1926."[23] As unrealistic as it is, the idea that Jesus's missing teenage years were spent in Tibet made the location important for some people.[24]

Hollywood's connection to Tibet started in the 1930s with Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937) and reached its peak in 1997 with two popular movies, *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet*. Hollywood produced a large number of movies about Tibet and Buddhism overall, strange for a Western culture so dismissive of the East. Movies such as *The Razor's Edge* (1946), *Storm over Tibet* (1952), the musical remake of *Lost Horizon* (1973), *The Razor's Edge* (1984), *The Golden Child* (1986), and *Little Buddha* (1993) were screened. In addition Tibetan and Buddhist characters appeared in a great number of Hollywood movies, with the most notable being *Kim* (1945), *The Millionaires* (1960), *The Road to Hong Kong* (1962), *Jacob's Ladder* (1990), *Point Break* (1991), *What's Love Got to Do with It* (1993), *The Shadow* (1994), *Omaha* (1995), *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* (1995), *The Glimmer Man* (1996), *The Quest* (1996), *The Kid from Tibet* (1992), *Bulletproof Monk* (2003). Here we will cover *Lost Horizon* and *Little Buddha* in depth.

Lost Horizon

Lost Horizon, directed by Frank Capra and starring Ronald Colman, Jane Wyatt, John Howard, Margo, Thomas Mitchell, and Edward Everett Horton, is an extravagantly budgeted Columbia Productions movie. It is based on James Hilton's bestseller of the same name and was remade in 1973 as a big budget musical. The movie was released in 1937 during the Great Depression, a period resulting from the US stock exchange collapse of 1929. Western society and capitalism were facing the greatest challenges due to economic breakdown and the expansion of Mussolini's fascism and Hitler's nazism.

The movie starts in Baskul, China, on March 10, 1935, where Robert Conway has been sent to evacuate ninety Anglo people whose lives are endangered by the local revolution. Conway succeeds in his mission, yet his plane is hijacked, and he finds himself along with his brother George and three other passengers trapped in the middle of a wild storm in a remote, mysterious place. The passengers are finally rescued by the natives and brought to Shangri-La. The first moment they step into the city, the storm stops and they find themselves inside a wonderful sunny place with warm and refreshing weather. Inside this magical place, Conway and his friends witness all kinds of miracles and supernatural phenomena, and above all, they go through deep spiritual experiences that transform their lives. Later on, the High Lama tells Conway that he was brought to replace him as the head of this

divine city. Shangri-La needs a new leader skilled in the ways of modern society, and Robert is chosen because of his writings. Moreover, Conway meets the charming angel-like Sondra Bizet, who has great talent in playing piano and grew up in the city. George, as well as a local named Maria, is frustrated by his stay there and uses tricks and family loyalty to convince Robert to leave the place. On their escape, George learns that Maria is not a young woman but is only kept youthful by Shangri-La. She collapses on the journey away from the city and dies; George jumps to his death after realizing his folly. Robert is found by a search party and forgets his journey until his return to England, where he boards a ship and makes his way back to the Himalayas, presumably returning to Shangri-La.

Lost Horizon opens with a striking simplicity displaying a smooth flow of poetic yet stimulating words over a white background: "In these days of wars and rumors of wars…haven't you ever dreamed of a place where there was peace and security, where living was not a struggle but a lasting delight? Of course you have. So has every man since time began. Sometimes he calls it Utopia… Sometimes the fountain of Youth…Sometimes merely 'that little chicken farm.' One man had such a dream and saw it come true. He was Robert Conway…England's 'Man of the East,' soldier, diplomat, public hero."

Frank Capra uses this direct documentary-like sequence to assure the audience that their dream of a heavenly place on earth can be fulfilled. Capra rationally exposes the audience goal of a divine refuge free of struggle. He also speaks to the active viewers, raising a fundamental question regarding peace and security in a modern world so racked with worry and pain.

Lost Horizon is best described as a complex combination of spiritualism, ancient mythology, Buddhism, and mystical novels where Christian ethics are safeguarded alongside Eastern ethics. However, the movie avoids projecting the complications of Buddhist philosophy and the reincarnation process, as well as the rigidity of the Western religion that involves Christian doctrine. It provides us a way to look at Western religions from an Eastern perspective. Even though it upholds all the virtues of Christianity, *Lost Horizon* introduces Tibetan Buddhism, which embraces traits of Christian religion as an alternative religion that meets better with people's modern forms of knowledge, needs, and happiness. Shangri-La is founded by a Western priest who becomes the High Lama and manages to infiltrate some of his beliefs into the Buddhist society to end up with an ideal religion based on "moderation and happiness."

The movie draws on the similarities between Tibetan Buddhism and Christianity, such as love, peace, kindness, and understanding; however, it contains hidden messages regarding the inefficiency and inconsistency of Christianity. The movie proclaims that too much virtue is bad, referring to Christian virtues that consist of too much restraint and pain. It also depicts the sins of the West, such as the inappropriate distribution of goods. A simple rule to put an end to human transgression is "brotherhood, love, and collaboration." Thus by annihilating sins, there will be no need for repentance and forgiveness, which is the core of the Christian religion. The question of religion is discussed with simple words between Mr. Chang—the Lama in charge of Shangri-La—and Robert Conway—British diplomat and soldier:

Robert Conway: By the way, what religion do you follow here?

Mr. Chang: To put it simply, I should say that our general belief was in moderation. We preach the

virtue of avoiding excess of every kind, even including excess of virtue itself.

ROBERT CONWAY: That's intelligent.

MR. CHANG: In the valley, it makes for better happiness among natives. We rule with moderate strictness…and in return, we are satisfied with moderate obedience. As a result our people are moderately honest, moderately chaste, and somewhat more than moderately happy.

ROBERT CONWAY: How about law and order? You have no soldiers or police?

MR. CHANG: Good heavens, no.

ROBERT CONWAY: How do you deal with incorrigibles, criminals?

MR. CHANG: We have no crime here. What makes a criminal? Lack usually. Avariciousness, envy. The desire to possess something owned by another. There can be no crime when there is sufficiency of everything.

Lost Horizon personifies the theosophy phenomenon through a series of supernatural events that occur because of the spiritual power reserved in Tibet; the magical and the normal coexist in harmony in a divine place where everything is possible. The viewer witnesses the miracles of eternal youth, cure of diseases, long life, and mastery over the weather. Capra demonstrates these occurrences and leads the public beyond the dream scope by pushing them toward accepting the fictional as a feasible reality. Capra, thanks to his exceptional talent in using the cinematographic language, manages to make the viewers concretely visualize the abstract thought of "eternal youth" through the scenes featuring Maria as a young, beautiful, active, and dynamic woman inside Shangri-La and then turning dull, motionless, exhausted, ugly, and very old once outside the mystical city. One of the most powerful scenes of *Lost Horizon* is when George looks for the first time at the face of Maria after having left Shangri-La and starts shouting hysterically, "Bob! Bob! Look at her face! Look at her face!" while the camera moves smoothly to a close up picture of Maria's face that appears lifeless with many intense wrinkles. This shocking moment reveals the truth about the spiritual power of Shangri-La and makes the viewer tremble with excitement for the thought of a divine place on Earth, but at the same time makes them feel guilty as much as George, who committed suicide for doubting the existence of such a place. In Shangri-La, every dream of the West is realized.

Lost Horizon confronts the West with their evil nature of greed, malice, violence, and ignorance that emerges out of their blind love for money and authority; the more they gain power, the more they contribute in the destruction process that will eventually lead to near annihilation of humankind, like Maria once she leaves the valley. The movie is most of all a form of protest, from the actively liberal director, against the conservatism and military society rampant in Europe at the time. Shangri-La extends beyond human dreams to lead to an urgent need for the salvation of the world. The divine power of the valley will rebuild human beings with more blissful qualities of love and wisdom that will develop out of knowledge, arts, and Christian ethics. The importance of Shangri-La is revealed strikingly through the High Lama's vision.

HIGH LAMA: We have reason. It is the entire meaning and purpose of Shangri-La. It came to me in a vision…long, long ago. I saw all the nations strengthening…not in wisdom, but in the vulgar passions and the will to destroy. I saw their machine power multiplying…until a single weaponed man might match a whole army. I foresaw a time when man, exulting in the technique of murder…

> would rage so hotly over the world…that every treasure would be doomed to destruction. This vision was so vivid and so moving…that I determined to gather together all things of beauty and culture that I could and preserve them here…When brutality and the lust for power must perish by its own sword. Against that time is why I avoided death and am here…and why you were brought here. For that day comes, the world must begin to look for a new life. And it is our hope that they may find it here. For here, we shall be with their books and their music and the way of life based on one simple rule: Be kind. When that day comes it is our hope that the brotherly love of Shangri-La will spread throughout the world.

Lost Horizon provides a powerful visual and demonstrates the fears of what was to come, even before the adoption of nuclear power. James Hilton and Frank Capra invented Shangri-La as a world, but they are above all credited for their invention of a new word as a synonym to utopia that penetrated into many Western fiction and nonfiction works: "When James Hilton's 1933 novel, Lost Horizon, was released as a film in 1937, it was the apotheosis of Tibet as fantasy realm. With it, the notion of that land as paradisiacal Shangri-La entered both the imagination and the vocabulary of Western popular culture, becoming one of the most powerful utopian metaphors of our time."[25] However, the cinematographic version of *Lost Horizon* does not match exactly with the Hilton novel, as we can note some differences between the two works; the major difference is at the end of the story. Hilton's novel shows doubts in the last pages about the existence of such a divine place on earth. Capra's movie tells with certain confirmation in the closing scene that Shangri-La is a real place located somewhere in Tibet. The book is more nuanced about the possibility of a real Shangri-La. The movie leaves no doubt that this world is real and possible, a much-needed message at the time then, and now.

Little Buddha

Little Buddha, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci in 1994 and starring Keanu Reeves, Bridget Fonda, Chris Isaak, Ying Ruicheng, and Alex Wiesendanger, was a big-budget production at the time. It projects the life of the first Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, who has been the subject of some Asian and European movies such as *Lord Buddha* (1923) by Dadasheb Phalke; *The Light of Asia* (1928) by Franz Osten; *The Legend of the Great Buddha* (1952) by Teinosuke Kinugasa; *Gotama the Buddha* (1957) by Rajbans Khanna; *Buddha* (1961) by Kenji Misumi Shakyamuni; *Buddha* (1964) by Il-ho Jang; *Buddha* (1997), an Indian serial directed by P. C. Reddy; *Life of Buddha* (2001) by Martin Messonnier; and *The Legend of Buddha* (2004) by Shamboo Falke.

Little Buddha opens with a Tibetan Buddhist teacher—Lama Norbu, who is living in exile—telling a legend to children gathered in one room of a monastery. The Lama is interrupted by a young monk bringing him interesting news about the purported reincarnation of a great Buddhist teacher, Lama Dorje, whose soul might have been transferred to a nine-year-old American boy living in Seattle. Lama Norbu, along with other monks, travels to the United States to find the boy and bring him to Bhutan for further tests. Unlike his parents, who show some suspicion and even hostility toward the monks, the boy becomes very interested and even fascinated with Buddhism after meeting the monks. The father relents after a friend commits suicide, making him doubt Western traditional forms of life. Lama Norbu hands the boy an illustrated book about the Lord Buddha, and the boy wants to learn

more.

The movie also weaves in the story of the original Buddha with the modern life of the American boy. Buddha, or Siddhartha, was raised in a palace where his father the king surrounds him with all kinds of joy, pleasure, and happiness. One day Buddha decides to see what is outside the palace, and during his tour in the city he encounters some old, sick, and poor people, who he never saw in his well-protected palace. Buddha is extremely shocked to discover misery, pain, poverty, and worst of all, death. He then decides to challenge human destiny and defeat death. After a long journey in the prairies, where he totally neglects his body, he manages finally to establish a perfect harmony between the body and the soul, reaching enlightenment. Buddha is exposed to many temptations from the evil of the materialistic world, such as pride, greed, fear, ignorance, and desire, yet his soul overcomes all the obstacles to attain perfection and enlightenment.

The movie ends with the proclamation of the reincarnation of the great Lama's soul within the American boy and two other Indian children representing the soul and mind of the past Lama. The children represent the possibilities of the future and the chance that the West can move beyond the greed and malice so prevalent in modern-day life.

Little Buddha amazingly merges Buddhist spirituality with childhood fantasy and old myths; thus it succeeds in presenting Tibetan Buddhism to the West within a simple, delightful frame. Bertolucci explains the complicated and unfamiliar reincarnation process via practical rationalization techniques using simple words, visual interpretations, illustrated pages, and significant stories. Through Jesse, the American boy, Bertolucci aims to draw the attention of Western children and adults alike to one of the most powerful Far East religions. In the captivating introductory scene, the legend of a cow that Lama Norbu tells the children summarizes the doctrine of reincarnation: in her past life, the cow was a High Lama, and when she dies, her soul will move to a human body. Moreover, the movie provides visual interpretation for the abstract Buddhist religion; it includes dynamic images for some dense Buddhist teachings, such as the concept of *impermanence*:

> Tibetan Buddhism emphasizes awareness of death and impermanence. Everything is always dying—the cells of our bodies are dying even while we live, reminding us of our own impermanence. And all the living things around us are dying, too. This awareness should not produce sadness or despair, nor should it cause a Buddhist to start a frantic pursuit of the impermanent pleasures of life. Instead, it should lead the Buddhist to see the value of every moment of existence, and be diligent in their meditation and other religious practice. Awareness of death, combined with the understanding of the impermanence of everything, leads the Buddhist to realize that only spiritual things have any lasting value.[26]

Bertolucci explains the Tibetan awareness of impermanence using several scenes. The most notable is the one showing three lamas involved seriously and patiently in the construction of a huge mandala. Lama Norbu explains to Dean (Jesse's father) that, once it is completed, the mandala will be destroyed with one gesture "to show the impermanence of all within the universe." Throughout the scene the camera takes two close-up shots of the mandala that reveal a wonderful work of art exposing Buddhism's belief of wholeness and our relation to the world and the infinity.

Little Buddha successfully introduces Buddhist religion to the Christian Western society. It

establishes, with great caution, a wonderful relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. Throughout the movie we see Buddha compared to Jesus and the Buddhist monastery, to a church. Bertolucci reflects the perception of several Western missionaries regarding the similarity between Tibetan Buddhism and Christianity, such as the Portuguese Jesuit Antonio de Andrade who depicts this similarity in his report *The New Discoveries of the Great Cathay, or Of the Tibetan Kingdom*.

This similarity in the movie is established verbally through the questions and comments of the American boy to the Buddhist monks and also visually with the scenes of Buddha in the prairies, which remind us of Jesus in the olive mountains, and when Buddha steps into water after reaching enlightenment, which reminds us of Jesus getting baptized in the Jordan River. Who is better than Bernardo Bertolucci, the Italian director raised in a Catholic family who was deeply influenced in his adulthood by Buddhism, to make a movie drawing the relationship between the two great religions? As Bertolucci states, "The difference between Buddhism and Christianity is that Christ says 'Love thy neighbor like thyself' but Buddhism teaches 'Love thy neighbor because he is yourself.'"[27]

Little Buddha dramatically exposes the gap between the cold, emotionless, hostile, and materialistic world of the West and the warm, friendly, and spiritual world of Tibetan Buddhists. The contrast is revealed not only through the dialogue but also through color, composition, camera angle, and the whole cinematographic language that Bertolucci masters perfectly. The cold colors in Seattle, such as blue, grey, and white, oppose the warm colors in the world of Buddha as well as the Buddhist monasteries that are red, orange, and yellow. Moreover, the movie personifies the theosophy phenomenon. The temporary death that Lama Norbu experiences at the end of the movie, during which his soul moves to Tibet, reminds us of Madame Blavatsky's mystical out-of-body travels to Tibet; it was circulated among theosophists that, after awakening from several days of a deathlike sleep, Blavatsky claimed that she was in Tibet.

While the movie was a positive reflection of Buddhist thought and Tibet in general, it was not well received by the public. The movie once again represents the heavy-handed nature of the West in their modes of storytelling. Such a complex and important story is unlikely to be told convincingly in two hours. Few remember that Keanu Reeves started as the young version of Buddha. Fortunately, the book *Siddhartha* remains popular and is required reading in American high schools.

The effects of the movie go beyond its limited success at the box office, and some consider it a more powerful interpretation of Buddhism than the book. It was of great value in spreading some understanding of that religion at the global level, as it forms an audio/visual, simplified, realistic, and pleasurable introduction to the Buddhist religion, which may serve educational purposes. During an interview that appeared in *Tricycle* magazine, Dzongsar Rinpoche—a Buddhist teacher, filmmaker, and writer—was asked how he became so interested in movies. Dzongsar replied that "movies are a powerful way of teaching, or demonstrating, or manifesting. Also of manipulating, in the sense of influencing." And about *Little Buddha* he said, "This film is better than a hundred monasteries because it will reach throughout the world."[28] In the modern era the movie is considered as an instrument of education, and *Little Buddha* falls within this category of movies holding educational values. Therefore, "Miramax issued a so-called *Miramax Classic DVD* of the picture later, so that it could be used in teaching programmes at schools and universities (website *Teach with Movies*)…The probable reason for this is that it gives a short survey of Buddha's life up until his enlightenment while simultaneously giving the audience the opportunity to become acquainted with the atmosphere of Tibetan Buddhism, which is important since it has become one of the most common varieties of this

religion in the West."[29]

The production team of *Little Buddha* movie went on to make many other great films and supported one of the best received and special Tibetan films, *The Cup* (1999). The movie tells the story of a young Tibetan living in a monastery in India who is found with a soccer ball and shows a great desire to watch World Cup finals on television. That raises the concern of the Lama in charge of the monastery, who at first forbids the children from watching the game. *The Cup* reveals the worries of the monks about the changing in the life of the new Tibetan generation that may distance them from Buddha's teachings. The movie concludes with the establishment of a balanced relationship between the Western and Tibetan culture. The Lama finds out that the Tibetans' integration into the modern world could be positive if this integration is limited and does not affect the Tibetan beliefs and culture. *The Cup* succeeds in balancing the challenges of modern life (television and sports) with the Tibetan religious culture, creating a sympathetic picture of modern Buddhist life.

No matter what convictions these films may evoke, it is clear they reflect the wider concerns of Western society and are political in intent. It is difficult to divorce the dramatic from the political. *Lost Horizon* was meant to criticize the cruelty of war and envy in society and also suggest that Tibet is the future of humanity. *Little Buddha* was meant to communicate the complicated story of man who overcame much to reach spiritual enlightenment. *The Good Earth* is supposed to be positive reflections of Chinese society but instead mainly misrepresents some negative aspects of Chinese life. *Fu Manchu* is really a story of culture, fear, and hysteria clouded by racism. This is the pattern of Hollywood films as they interact with Asia—China and Tibet in particular. As we further analyze other movies that cover this region, we will continue to see the same themes, depending on the time in history they are released and the station of Chinese power at the time.

Chapter 4
Hollywood and the Sino-Tibetan Conflict

Hollywood is built on legends and fantasy: "The American film industry has long had the capacity to take almost any dream, yearning, or projection and write it large as the heavens for the whole world to see."[1] It successfully promoted Tibet's virtues and magic with Capra's epic *Lost Horizon* in 1937. Sixty years later, Hollywood managed to trigger international awareness toward the Tibetan struggle with several remarkable movies representing the Tibetan perspective. In the 1990s, Hollywood, various movie stars, and some musicians, created a new legend of fantasy, belonging, and place centered on the question of Tibet and its status as a state. As Schell notes, "By the mid-1990s, this unparalleled engine of invention had alighted on Tibet as one of its chosen subjects. Almost everywhere one looked in the film world, Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism, and the Dalai Lama were being acclaimed and generating waves of collateral interest in other media and entertainment forms."[2]

Hollywood was able to channel its considerable might toward the fantasy of Tibet once again. Our goal is to chronicle and analyze the process of issue objectification of the Sino-Tibetan conflict as Hollywood used Tibetan myths and Western fantasy to interject itself in a global debate. The rest of this chapter will proceed with an examination of this event, its causes, and its impact.

Modern Tibet and Territoriality

Territoriality is a key concept in international relations and considered by some to be the key to war and peace. "From the perspective of territoriality, interstate wars arise from attempts by human collectivities to demark territorial units, which form the basis for economic survival and well being."[3] Since territoriality is at the heart of our biological processes, it is also at the heart of international interactions as the most important issue at stake between states or various competitors. An issue-based approach to international politics suggests the issues that are the most important for the state at various times determine action in the system: "This concept is at the core of international interactions since issues are the source of conflict and territorial issues are the most violence prone."[4]

Tibet is a territorial issue like many other contentious issues at the heart of international interactions, such as Palestine or Taiwan. While no other state besides China claims Tibet as their own, some Tibetans and activists consider Tibet to be a separate and independent entity. Its status as a potentially autonomous unit makes it a special case in the territory literature. The Tibetans have no

independent military or revolutionary military, vacillating between Chinese rule and self-proclaimed independence depending on the moment in history.

The issue of Tibet and its status as a territorial piece of a much larger puzzle colors how states interact with the region. China dominates and controls the region. Since territorial stability is at the heart of national interest, China has an intense interest in maintaining its rule over Tibet. If China cannot control Tibet, it will have less credibility on the assert that it is a great power. If the United States, India, and the United Kingdom cannot influence China to become more accommodating toward Tibet, then they have to question their status as great powers themselves. All these various issues combine to influence perceptions of modern Tibet. Tibet is stuck between China's great power ambitions and the West's desire to check these ambitions.

Modern images of Tibet are mainly viewed through the Western lens of defiance and revolution in the context of China's territorial control over Tibet. For the West, Tibet symbolizes the extent to which China will go to dominate a population and destroy a once proud culture. Enhanced by Western love of Buddhist culture and ideas, Tibet symbolizes for the West a place of mystery and mysticism destroyed by an imperial power. Despite this perception being almost entirely fictional, it is also directly at odds with the Chinese view of modernization and the restoration of control lost due to ineffective governance in the first half of the 1900s. For China, their interactions with Tibet are benevolent because they are modernizing the country and restoring its bureaucracy after centuries of decline.

A reassertive China means that the state has begun to look toward consolidating control over territories it had once thought lost. Most of Chinese history has seen China in control of Tibet, though the roles were reversed briefly during the period that extended from the seventh until the mid-ninth centuries. In the early 1900s, Western powers sought to open relations with Tibet, but this process stalled in 1907 when Russia and Britain agreed to only engage Tibet through China. China invaded the territory in 1910 but abandoned this effort when there was internal revolution in China during 1911. Until the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949, Tibet operated as an independent state.

The Communist victory in 1949 ended this period of freedom. In 1950 Chinese troops entered Tibet, and Tibetan leaders signed over controlof the territory in 1951. The Seventeen Point Agreement gave China territorial control over the region in exchange for China's promise of stability. Various revolts occurred until the Chinese established the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in 1965. While autonomy was promised, it was never quite realized. China retained effective political, economic, and cultural control over Tibet.

Chinese migration into Tibet has changed the cultural makeup of the region. While Tibetans are effectively the majority, they retain little political control over the state. This has led to various calls for revolution or complete autonomy by various leaders, the Dalai Lama included (for autonomy only). While being a region focused on nonviolent resistance, there is still an undercurrent of direct opposition to Chinese rule. To this end, Tibet sends many cultural emissaries to the West to gain support for the overall cause. These emissaries (much like modern-day Marco Polo's) have painted a fantastical image of the region and pushed the Western media to side with Tibet.

The most recent wave of protests effectively began in 2008. Led by the religious sector, Tibetans sought greater political control over their state and a halt to the all-encompassing domination by the Han Chinese. At first the marchers were intercepted and forced back to the monasteries with violence, but the protests only continued and gained momentum. Led by the Buddhist monks, the

people effectively participated in a nonviolent revolution that had to be crushed by the Chinese lest they lose control of the region. An unknown number of monks were killed and many more detained, curtailing the movement. Once again, in 2011, a rise of anti-Chinese protests was brought on by a series of self-immolations by various monks (and also some nuns). The Dalai Lama was labeled a terrorist for encouraging the self-immolations—though he did not encourage these events and only commemorated the deaths. Chinese military patrols have taken to carrying fire extinguishers as part of their normal gear.[5]

The self-immolations in 2011 represent a new threat for the Chinese leadership. The reaction to a spiritual cornerstone of society willingly committing public suicide can be powerful and devastating for continued Chinese control. China, at this point, is limiting the spread of information in the region in the hopes these protests die down. The question is what reaction the West will have to the new wave of protests—thus far, the reaction has been silence. But what really is at stake?

The essential character of the debate and issue under contention regarding Tibetan independence or autonomy is both the political and cultural. While political independence is sought, the real issue is mainly the Chinese attempts to destroy the influence of the Dalai Lama and monks. It is said that every Tibetan worships the Lama and secretly hides photos and paintings of his image in their homes. The Chinese, on the other hand, label the Lama as a revolutionary and terrorist.

Cultural and political autonomy are the main demand of most Tibetan activists. The likelihood of this happening through internal pressure is slim due to China's complete control of the state. It is a rising economic power in the world, effectively limiting demands over the treatment of the Tibetans to a last place consideration in relation to economic demands, including free trade, currency devaluation, and the removal of barriers to access for Western corporations. That Tibet was never really able to establish a recognized state during its period of de facto independence does not bode well for its claim as an independent state. Secession from China is an unrealistic possibility as long as China has immense political and economic power in the region. As in times past, China's control over Tibet weakened when it lost full control over its own territory and people. The main hope for Tibetan independence resides in the complete decline of the Chinese state. Since this is unlikely to happen, simple autonomy seems to be the best the Tibetans can hope for; yet this is also unlikely to happen as in-migration of the Han Chinese overtakes the region.

This territorial issue frames the entirety of our book. The goal for the rest of the book will be to explain and explore the construction of Western images of Sino-Tibetan conflict. We will investigate how these perceptions lead to positive images of Tibet in relation to negative images of China. Finally, we ask, what is the content of these views? Do positive views of Tibet by Western media companies contribute to enhanced understanding of the situation in the region and to possible independence for the Tibetans? Is cultural soft power a force that can lead to more Tibetan autonomy? While many speak of the importance of soft power, few explore it in relation to actual policy and international relations dynamics. Once again, territory is key for international politics, but here we find its importance declining as Tibet's ability to effectively marshal international support declines in relation to the rise of China's economic potential.

Hollywood and New Enemies

We have previously examined the context and political process of the Tibet conflict; here we examine

how the conflict became part of the Hollywood dialogue. On one hand, Western interests and admiration for Tibet grew further due to the popularity of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, the global expansion of the Theosophy Society, and the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the Western community, mainly among celebrities. On the other hand, Western attention was drawn to China for four major reasons. First, China emerged as the most powerful Communist country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Communism is still considered a great enemy of Western capitalist states. Second, China witnessed a remarkable economic growth that was perceived as a threat to American interests. Third, it was considered by the Western people to be one of the very few countries still engaged in occupations and colonialism. Finally, it was perceived by the Western states as the country with one of the most oppressive regimes, using bloody measures to suppress internal opposition and to stifle democracy. All these issues together make an "us against them" conflict. The "us" is the West and the United States standing in global unity for democracy and freedom, and "them" is perceived to be China, as seen through an Orientalist lens of backwardness and the fear of conquest.

Two major events that took place at the end of the 1980s had a strong impact upon the Western public perception of Tibet and China. The Nobel Peace Prize that the Dalai Lama received in 1989 for leading nonviolent opposition against the Chinese occupation helped in building the sympathy and admiration of the West toward Tibet. Conversely, it was the Tiananmen Square crackdown of the same year that further worsened China's image in the West. The wide coverage of the Western media, which accompanied the Chinese students in their demonstrations against the Communist regime at that period, as well as their strong support of the young protesters created a great compassion among the West toward these Chinese youths who were trying to change China. The severe attacks that Chinese forces carried out against thousands of students demonstrating peacefully in the streets of Beijing had a devastating effect on China's image. Hollywood saw in China the most dangerous opponent to Tibet and its sacred leader, the seeds of a powerful "evil empire" that could one day replace the Soviet Union.

> Images of Tian'anmen began to circulate on global screens attached to widely varying significations. Hollywood picked up Tian'anmen as a link in a narrative causal chain that could explain the violence at the heart of a string of action-adventure plots in need of rationalization because the end of the Cold War had done away with an important aspect of the formula. Conveniently, China became the new "evil empire," linked with all sorts of other more concrete evils like drug trafficking, prostitution, and illegal immigrant labor, that held greater meaning for global working class audiences more suspicious of the excesses of transnational capitalism than the more remote oppressiveness of the Chinese state.[6]

Hollywood's most popular themes during the Cold War centered on the Soviet Union and its Communist allies as the consistent source of evil and problems in the world. During the Cold War era, most movies reflected the Americans fear of the spreading of Communism throughout the world, threatening their own country and culture. Covert themes such as alien invasion, zombie plagues, and nuclear holocaust all represented the fear of the Soviets. Overt themes of Russian invasion and Communism expansion became the key subjects of hundreds of Hollywood movies. The collapse of the Soviet Union put an end to the Cold War, and thus the Western fears and interests shifted from

Russia to China, Japan, and the Middle East. China, as a threat, is not new to the experience since Hollywood released in the 1950s and 1960s several movies revealing this negative image. The most notable among these movies is *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962): "In the movie, Chinese communists and their American agents use brainwashing and torture so that they can fulfill their mission of international Communist conspiracy."[7] Yet these films were mainly overshadowed by anti-Soviet movies focused on the more prominent enemy.

The sparse appearance of China in Cold War dramas has shifted with the development of some high-production movies at the end of the twentieth century. The 1990s movies strongly exhibit traits of the "new evil empire," while some of the most famous anti-Communist movies that remained popular after the collapse of the Soviet Union managed to survive through replacing their villain of the Soviet Union with that of characters from the Middle East and China. One of the most notable movies that replaced its old traditional European or Soviet villain with a Chinese character is the James Bond movie *Tomorrow Never Dies*. Michael Buckley explains in his book, "An indicator of this shift of evil empires was the plot of the 1997 James Bond film, *Tomorrow Never Dies*. No KGB here; the movie was originally slated to be about the handover of Hong Kong, but missed its timing so the script was changed to a stand-off between China and Britain, with the two teetering on the brink of war because of the ambitions of an out-of-control media megalomaniac."[8] For a short period in the 1990s, this shift of enemies was evident and based on larger perceptions of Chinese fallibility.

Hollywood cinema projected its new universal global fight through the prism of its members' sympathies toward Tibet, their admiration for Buddhism, and their interactions with the Dalai Lama while employing its typical themes of negativity toward the new enemies and villains trying to take over the world and destroy its essential goodness. Thus the existential fight in Hollywood shifted from America's righteous stand against the Soviets to America and Tibet's righteous stand against Chinese evil. The dominant genre in the movie industry regarding this type of global fight shifted from science fiction toward fantasy and myths in response to the end of the Cold War. In the late 1990s, the fantasy and myths in movies dealing with China, Tibet, and their protracted conflict have been framed within a more concrete historical context. The most notable movies that marked Hollywood's new trend in support of Tibet in the 1990s are *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner*. These films will be the focus of this chapter.

Hollywood Brings the Tibet Conflict to the Big Screen

Hollywood's attention was drawn to China in the mid-1980s, reflecting the raising anxiety of the West toward a regime being perceived as another version of the hostile Communist regime of the Soviet Union. China serves as both a huge potential market and also a cultural threat to the dominance of the West. Hollywood brought back Fu Manchu-like villains to the big screen with several blockbuster movies such as *Gremlins, Year of the Dragon*, and *Big Trouble in Little China*.

Year of the Dragon was released in 1985. The movie quickly raised the ire of the Asian American community for its racism, stereotyping, and the offensive presentation of the Chinese. The Chinatown neighborhood in the movie embodies evil deeds such as corruption, crimes, and exoticism while the Chinese characters are projected as wicked, exotic, and subhuman. The Chinese community in America organized many demonstrations protesting against the movie, calling for its boycott. The protestors to the movie claim, "We believe that the film grossly distorts the public's perceptions of

Chinese Americans during a time of great misunderstanding and anti-Asian sentiment. Chinatown is portrayed as 'an exotic foreign world deep within the city' that is dominated by criminals and youth groups-a portrayal that the New York's 'Daily News' called the revival of 'the oriental villain.'"[9]

Hollywood launched another Chinatown-centric movie in 1986 with *Big Trouble in Little China*. Even though the movie was not a box office success, it managed to gain fame and cult status through cable viewership and rentals in the United States. The movie brings the fight in *Year of the Dragon* to a higher level because it pinpoints the enemy as an exact Fu Manchu-type villain while declaring that China is the source of evil. As Selma Bidlingmaier notes, "The presentation of China and the Chinese as the other is obvious from the title of the movie—'Big Trouble in Little China'—and is further reinforced in the movie by Uncle Chu's insistence that 'China is here' and that Tong's have brought their evil to Chinatown. The implication of the statement does not merely evoke a sense of mystery in play, but also a sense of dread and danger as China seems to represent all that is evil and to be feared by the West."[10]

In *Big Trouble in Little China*, Chinatown is the source of evil in the city. It is a mysterious and mystical place to be defeated by the American hero. It is in this context that the dichotomy between support for Tibet and hatred toward China can be viewed in cinema. The release of *The Golden Child* represented the future for Hollywood as it interacted with Tibet through constrained positivity.

The Golden Child

Hollywood first introduced to the Western audience the conflict between Tibet and China in the mid-1980s with Eddie Murphy's *The Golden Child*. The movie succeeds in fulfilling its purpose as a reminder to the Westerners of all the beauty and magic of Tibet and Buddhism. It "reinforces what we might call the Shangri-La syndrome. In the movie, an Asian group hires a private detective to find a kidnapped Tibetan boy, the Golden Child, who possesses mystical powers."[11] However, the new element added to Shangri-La-like movies is the direct involvement of Tibetans in a fight against their annihilators. The good guys in this movie are the Tibetans and their Western rescuer (Murphy): "Golden Child is a saviour-style figure, who even has the power to bring people back from the dead, a westerner rescues Buddhism which is the source of peace and spiritual power in the world."[12] Even though the identity of the dark forces that are trying to destroy Tibet—source of goodness on earth—remain verbally ambiguous, the bad guys are clearly Chinese forces. The real enemy proves to be some sort of Chinese devil and not the Anglo leader of the opposition gang, it was a disguise all along.

The Golden Child is a comedy-fantasy-adventure movie that centers on a virtuous child and future High Lama who has been kidnapped by dark forces from a Tibetan monastery in Tibet and brought to Los Angeles so he can be executed. The child is the Golden Child who comes to earth every thousand generations to make it a better place where love, compassion, justice, and wisdom prevail. The child holds strong magic power, including resurrection powers reminding us of those characters experienced in *Lost Horizon*. Once in the United States, the villain Sardo Numspa proceeds with his tricks to try to corrupt the child by forcing him to drink blood, thus destroying his goodness and making him mortal. Meanwhile, the monastery's allies start a search for the child and send a skilled martial artist and priestess named Kee Nang to find the only person who can help. The savior foretold in legend turns out to be Chandler Jarrell (Eddy Murphy); a social worker specialized in finding

missing children. Jarrell manages to overcome the many dangerous obstacles and succeeds in saving the child and thus the world.

The Golden Child exposes through nuance part of the intricacies of the Sino-Tibetan conflict. The movie brought back to Westerners all the charm of "Shangri-La" through the blissful child, while putting world virtues at stake because of the dark forces trying viciously to destroy them by destroying the child. The metaphor is clear—destruction of Tibet can lead to the destruction of all that is good in this world, as this bit of dialogue illustrates:

Jarrell (Eddie Murphy): Tell me about the Golden Child.

Dragon Lady: Every thousand generations, a perfect child is born. A Golden Child. He has come to rescue us.

Jarrell: Rescue us from what?

Dragon Lady: From ourselves. He is the Bringer of Compassion. If he dies, compassion will die with him.

Jarrell: If something happens to the kid, the whole world goes to hell?

Dragon Lady: The world will become hell.

The enemy is clear in this movie, even though the identity of the dark forces is never mentioned verbally in the movie. When Jarrell is asked in the movie about the identity of those who kidnapped the child, the answer is vague and generalized: "Those who want evil rather than good." However, throughout the film, Western audiences are exposed to powerful evidence, symbols, and visual images validating the existing picture of Tibet's real enemy embodied in their consciousness: the evil Chinese. The movie opens with a bloody massacre committed by unknown troops, mostly Asian in nature, under the command of the demon Sardo Numspa, against the peaceful Tibetan monks during a ritual ceremony in the Potala Temple. Throughout this violent introductory scene, we are exposed to some very strong visual, close-up images of a Chinese warrior. Many other good examples could be provided through the movie about the strong link between the dark forces and the Chinese, such as the gangs holding the Golden Child in New York, who are mainly Chinese living in secret underground rooms in Chinatown.

The issue was ignored until the late 1990s, when Hollywood's major production companies openly joined the battle between China and Tibet, siding with the perceptively virtuous Tibetans through three outstanding movies. *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* aim to spread awareness about the spiritual and political life of the fourteenth Dalai Lama and the Tibetans' struggle for freedom. *Red Corner*, on the other hand, focuses on China's Communist regime using force to control the people, thus implying the kind of tyrant the Tibetans are struggling against.

Kundun

The 1997 Martin Scorsese masterpiece *Kundun* depicts the life of the fourteenth Dalai Lama from his early childhood in Tibet to his exile in India. Born November 17, 1942, in Queens, New York, to an Italian American family, Scorsese managed to achieve great success in the cinema world. The primary themes of Scorsese's work are a combination of paradoxes: violence and integrity,

redemption and sin, solitude and obsession, and Italian American identity. He directed many famous movies, such as *Italian-American* (1974), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *New York, New York* (1977), *Raging Bull* (1980), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), *The Age of Innocence* (1993), *Casino* (1995), *Kundun* (1997), *Gangs of New York* (2002), and *The Departed* (2006).

In *Kundun*, Scorsese proves to be a master in any theme that catches his interest; he includes a central paradox at the heart of the film, turning the story of the exiled Dalai Lama into a deep exploration of Tibetan culture. Fascinated by the people conducting a spiritual life and who believe totally in nonviolence, compassion, kindness, and tolerance, Scorsese decided to reveal to the world the true image of the Dalai Lama that is the incarnation of all these virtues.Scorsese hoped that his movie would contribute to solving the China-Tibet conflict by ending violence over the magical and spiritual land. In terms of his work, this story represents the duality of nature. Good versus evil, spirituality versus cold, hard rationalism.

> I'm fascinated by Tibetans because in effect they're really in rebellion, but they're not terrorists, the way it is in Northern Ireland or the Middle East, or Spain or many parts of the world, and we just have to know about this. They're doing it, I believe through a peaceful resistance, or at least trying to, I don't really know, I know at least in Lhasa things are held pretty tightly. But for people to be jailed, for people to be punished for carrying a picture of the Dalai Lama, it's a little excessive…So we should know more about them, and hopefully, maybe, ultimately, with enough of the Western world understanding the situation in Tibet, maybe apply some pressure for our governments to be peace makers. Have two people sitting down at a table and start talking if it takes ten years. Something good has got to happen.[13]

Kundun is based on the autobiography of Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama. The movie's title holds the essence of the story; *Kundun* means "the presence of Buddha" and is one of the titles of the Dalai Lama. Most consider the Dalai Lama the most important political and religious figure in Tibet and the supreme head of Tibetan Buddhism. Best interpreted as "Ocean of Wisdom," the Dalai Lama is believed to be the reincarnation of Avalokitesvara—bodhisattva of boundless compassion. After death his soul moves to another body, usually a newborn boy, who then becomes the new Dalai Lama. The monks' duty is to find the child who is the deceased Lama's reincarnation. The child should go through various traditional tests, but the main sign of reincarnation would be his familiarity with the possessions of the previous Dalai Lama (a process also illustrated in *The Golden Child*). The first Dalai Lama was discovered hundreds of years ago. Since then, there have been 14 successive Dalai Lamas (although there is some controversy as to the actual number and selection of some Lamas). The latest one now lives in exile in India.

Kundun takes place in Tibet, though it was shot in Morocco. The movie opens in a small town in Tibet where, after a long search, the monks find a boy whom they perceive as the fourteenth reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. The young boy should go through a test to prove his identity; he should choose from various objects the ones that belong to the thirteenth Dalai Lama. The child passes the test, and two years later the monks bring him to live with them in Lhasa to be proclaimed at the right time as the fourteenth Dalai Lama. The child is called Kundun, after the first Dalai Lama. During this period, Reting Rinpoche (the regent of Tibet and the one who discovered the boy)

provides Kundun with the right education and spiritual training. Away from his home and family, Kundun suffers from moments of fear and nostalgia. To explain to Kundun his position, the Lamas tell him about the fifth and thirteenth Dalai Lamas. Thus the movie exposes the historical background of the two previous Dalai Lamas and their reign over Tibet during two periods of independence.

A few years later, Kundun becomes more mature and ready to hold some responsibilities in spiritual and political matters. At that time the PRC government declares Tibet as a part of a Chinese province and shows its desire to unify it under Chinese political control. The plea for help from the United Nations and the United States proves to be futile, and Chinese troops invade Tibet. The Chinese act in a friendly way at first, but as the Tibetans refuse to reorganize and reeducate their society the Chinese way, the Chinese government turns to hostility and oppression.

The movie proceeds to expose the extreme violence the Chinese use against the Tibetans, including terrible massacres and persecutions. In an attempt to end his people's suffering, the Dalai Lama decides to meet with the Chairman of the PRC—Mao Zedong. However, the meeting turns out to be very disappointing to the Tibetan leader, as Chairman Mao tells him that religion is a poison, and it should be restricted. The situation deteriorates further in Tibet when the Tibetans start to reject the Chinese, and the fourteenth Dalai Lama is forced to escape to India.

While Scorsese is undoubtedly a talented filmmaker, this project also represents the duality of his nature. It is a spectacular-looking film, but it is also biased and one-sided. The only perspective that is valid in the movie is that of the Tibetans. China is once again constructed as the vicious invader with its "yellow hordes" sweeping away Tibetan society and culture. The typical construct, which holds that Tibet equals peace and spirituality while China equals violence and authoritarianism, is held up once again. The true status of the territorial claim is ignored in favor of more esoteric notions of what it means to be a state and community. *Seven Years in Tibet* follows the same path.

Seven Years in Tibet

Seven Years in Tibet, released in 1997, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud and starring Brad Pitt, is another Hollywood movie supporting Tibet and acclaiming its leader. Brad Pitt has starred in many famous films, such as *Sleepers* (1996), *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1997), *Meet Joe Black* (1998), *Fight Club* (1999), *The Mexican* (2001), *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (2005), and *Moneyball* (2011). Even though Brad Pitt tries to avoid taking a firm political stand regarding Sino-Tibetan conflict, he revealed in several occasions his sympathy and great admiration for the Tibetan people.

That *Seven Years in Tibet* succeeds as a film in its creation of a solid political and spiritual message can mainly be attributed to Annaud's cinematographic capacity. Annaud, producer, director, and cowriter, was born in France in 1943. He became well known for making remarkable movies such as *Black and White in Color* (1976), *Quest for Fire* (1981), *The Name of the Rose* (1986), *The Bear* (1989), *The Lover* (1991), *Wings of Courage* (1995), and *Enemy at the Gates* (*2001*). Annaud was given a lifelong ban from entering China for his film *Seven Years in Tibet*. In the film, he reveals his great fondness toward the simplicity and the contentment of the Tibetans. When interviewed by Orville Schell, Annaud explained that his eagerness to bring Heinrich Harrer's classic tale to the screen can be attributed to the contradictions between the two societies: one possesses all the privilege of a wonderful life, yet people live their lives as unhappy beings, and the other one lacks

for the basic materialistic needs, yet the people are content with their lives. “We have been told since we were born that the ultimate goal in life is to get as much money as you can, and have fame, success, and be on TV…Why is it then, that most people that you find in Los Angeles will go on TV, have fame and a lot of money, but are so unhappy? On the contrary, why is it that people who have absolutely nothing and who are going along the tracks of Tibet prostrating, and have no possession glow with happiness?”[14]

The fascination of Annaud and many other Hollywood celebrities concerning the contentment of Tibetans, with their simple modest life as compared to the irritation of the Westerners possessing the technology and money, is similar to the fascination of several Western image formulators of Tibet who managed to enter the country in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. George Bogle, at the time of his departure from Tibet, wrote, “Farewell, ye honest and simple people! May ye long enjoy that happiness which is denied to more polished nations; and while they are engaged in the endless pursuits of avarice and ambition, defended by your barren mountains, may ye continue to live in peace and contentment, and know no wants but those of nature.”[15]

Seven Years in Tibet is an adaptation of the memoir by Heinrich Harrer. The movie takes place at the beginning of World War II and tells the story of a famous Austrian mountain climber, Heinrich Harrer (Brad Pitt), who leaves behind his pregnant wife to follow his dream and climb one of the highest mountain peaks in the world—the Himalayan Mountains. Harrer is tricked by some German officials to raise the Nazi flag on the highest summit in the world. Captured by the British army, Harrer manages to escape with a man, Peter Aufschnaiter (David Thewlis), from the POW camp in India, and both make their way to Tibet. As the movie progresses, the hero’s inner struggle develops further, and we see him writing letter after letter to his son, whom he has never met. In the Buddhist nation, Harrer becomes a very close friend to the spiritual leader of this holy land, and Peter marries a Tibetan woman. Harrer’s friendship with the Dalai Lama grows deeper with time and gradually begins to transform him from an arrogant man to a humble one. Harrer teaches the young Dalai Lama about astrology, geography, Western culture, and technology. In return, he learns from the Lama love, compassion, and modesty. This process represents the view of Hollywood that there is much to learn from Tibet. Western ways are flawed in that they lack compassion and humility. This theme is repeated over and over in similar movies.

As the war ends, Harrer decides to return home. At that time, China shows its intention to take over Tibet, claiming that it is a Chinese province. The Chinese troops invade Tibet, facing almost no resistance from the Tibetan army equipped with antiquated weapons. The Tibetan guerilla army continues its fight for many months until one of the leaders destroys all the gunpowder stores for the sake of a peaceful resolution with China. The movie ends with the Chinese troops occupying the holy land of Tibet; the viewers are exposed to a series of title cards documenting the death and destruction after the invasion of Tibet.

While the beauty of spiritual awakening is the goal of the book, the movie makes a starker point about the nature of the conflict between China and Tibet. Tibet is good and benevolent, much like Harrer, whose ties to the Nazi party as a former SS officer are glossed over in the movie. He even rejects the notion that he is a German, stating that he is an Austrian. The movie also shows personal growth for Harrer due to his time in Tibet, when such personal growth or ties to his family are not documented in the book.

Seven Years in Tibet made over $130 million at the worldwide box office—astounding for what

was essentially an art film. Even though it received mixed reviews, the movie won the 1998 Gold Guild Film Award for Foreign Film, the Political Film Society Award for Peace, and the Audience Award for Best Actor.[16] It was also nominated for more than seven other awards, including the Grammy Award for Best Instrumental Composition Written for a Motion Picture or for Television. The movie starred Brad Pitt at the height of his movie stardom. That he would choose this film when so many more commercial offerings were presented demonstrates the power of the Tibetan cause at the time. The film remains a fascinating statement of the Tibetan perspective and will likely endure for its cinematic beauty. *Red Corner* goes a bit further than *Seven Years in Tibet*, and instead focuses on the corruption and its internal roots within China.

Red Corner

Red Corner, released in 1997, was directed by Jon Avnet and stars Richard Gere. While *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* deal directly with the Tibet issue, Gere's *Red Corner* focuses mainly on China's legal system and corruption. Richard Gere is a prominent Hollywood actor. He was born in Philadelphia on August 31, 1949. Gere's professional life witnessed several ups and downs, yet he played many brilliant roles in a plethora of successful movies such as *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982), which grossed over $100 million in the box office, *Pretty Woman* (1990), *Somersby* (1993), *Primal Fear* (1996), *Runaway Bride* (1999), *Unfaithful* (2002), and *Shall We Dance* (2004). Later in his career, Gere turned down the lead roles in *Die Hard* and *Wall Street* to focus more on human rights causes. In 1986, he worked on a fact-finding mission in Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador, where thousands of people were being killed in armed conflicts. It was then that he began studying with the Dalai Lama to become, eventually, his most high-profile disciple.

Richard Gere met the Dalai Lama in 1982 and quickly became captivated by Tibet's spiritual leader. Gere describes his meeting with the Dalai Lama as the most important thing that ever happened to him. The Buddhist actor sees the Dalai Lama as a real teacher and a real friend with whom he is engaged in diverse political, sociable, and charitable works. Gere considers the Dalai Lama "the most simple man and the most complex man I've ever met. He's an artist and he's a farmer. He—like any great mind and heart—is able to engage each of us on a level where we exist…His Holiness said with total directness something that cut right through me. He said, 'I never thought I was better than any creature.' And when he says that, you believe it."[17]

As his friendship with the Dalai Lama was developing, Gere became more involved in many Tibetan activities. In 1987 he founded the Tibet House with the academic and musician Phillip Glass. The goal of the Tibet House is to present Tibetan culture to the West. In 1992, Gere joined the Board of Directors of the International Campaign for Tibet to be more efficient in addressing national and international forums of influence. He addressed the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, the US House of Representatives, the European Parliament, and the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva to provide information on the Tibetan cause and support Tibet's freedom.

In the 1990s, Gere cosponsored many activities of the Dalai Lama in New York City. The Gere Foundation, established in 1999, contributes directly to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan community-in-exile to aid in the cultural, religious, health, and educational survival of the Tibetan people. Richard Gere became not only a Buddhist but also Tibet's strongest activist and has found in his

successful acting career a way to support the Dalai Lama in his struggle. He has long been an outspoken opponent of the Chinese oppression of Tibet.

Red Corner provided Gere with a great opportunity to reveal and defend his political and spiritual goals. *Red Corner* costars the Chinese actress Bai Ling, who is active in the issue of human rights and witnessed the protest at Tiananmen Square. She served in the Chinese military as an actress-artist from the age of 14 to the age of 17, when she claimed, on American television, that she was abused by senior military officials while in Tibet. Bai also took part in *Red Corner* to spread her message. Bai has revealed on several occasions her fears to return to China, where her parents still live. "I think I'm doing the right thing. A lot of people in China, we're being silenced. We need to end it. Why can't we tell the truth? What are we afraid of?," the actress stated to *USA Today*.[18] Moreover, the role of Bai was severely criticized by the Chinese media: "The Shanghai's Wenhui bao accused Bai Ling, a graduate of the Xian Film Studio, of betraying China 'in order to get into A-rated films.'"[19]

Red Corner was directed and produced by Jon Avnet, a famous Hollywood producer, director, and screenwriter. Avnet was the producer of many successful movies, such as *Tango and Cash* (1989), *Men Don't Leave* (1990), *The Mighty Ducks* (1992), *The War* (1994), *Up Close and Personal* (1996), *George of the Jungle* (1997), and *Sky Captain and The World of Tomorrow* (2004). His reputation as a director was established with the movies *Up Close and Personal*, *The War*, and *Fried Green Tomatoes*. By producing *Red Corner*, Avnet aimed to defend human rights activism in China.

Red Corner takes place in China, though it was shot on a Hollywood soundstage. The movie opens with Jack Moore (Richard Gere), attorney of a huge American television corporation, taking a trip to Beijing to sign a deal with the Chinese government that allows the broadcasting of American television shows in the country. Jack faces difficulties in negotiating his deal with the government, which considers American movies to be of low quality and pornographic. At night Jack is taken to a Westernized nightclub where he meets a beautiful Chinese woman and ends the night in a hotel room. He wakes up next morning to find the woman dead on the floor and her blood all over him. Jack is arrested for murder and his protests of innocence are ignored. Even the US embassy is reluctant to provide the necessary support to gain his freedom. In prison, the American businessman becomes a victim of different kinds of harassment: no bed, no water, and a dirty toilet. The guards kick him and wash off his dinner plate in the toilet.

The movie proceeds with Jack's trial, where the American businessman finds himself facing a cruel judicial system. Shen Yuelin (Bai Ling), the court-appointed defense attorney, advises Jack to plead guilty to be spared execution; prisoners, charged with murder and who refuse to confess, are usually executed within a few hours of conviction. Jack refuses the guilty plea, insisting that he is innocent. Yuelin finds that her client is innocent and decides to help him. Both Jack and his lawyer search for the truth. Their mission seems to be impossible as Jack is condemned before the trial even starts, in a case of "verdict first, trial second." Meanwhile a strong and respectful relationship develops between the American businessman and the Chinese attorney. Eventually they discover a vast conspiracy within the Chinese government, suggesting the corrupt nature of the regime.

Red Corner focuses on Jack's trial, yet in fact it is the corrupt legal system and the oppressive regime of China that are at the core of the movie. The perspective is as simple as the older Hollywood movies suggesting Asian backwardness and evil. While the levels of conspiracy are exaggerated, the point still rings true that there are some flaws in the Chinese legal system. The perspective of *Red Corner* further perpetuates the implausible Hollywood scenario (not unheard of,

even against Western targets). The movie was a humble domestic box office success with $22 million but a better video rental success, as it was ranked thirty-seventh in 1999 with around $30 million revenue. A more realistic movie portraying the difficulties of a Chinese lawyer grounded in the realistic problems would probably be much more welcomed than the Hollywood fantasy projected in *Red Corner*.

Hollywood Celebrities Advance the Tibetan Cause

Hollywood celebrities, through their artistic skill and popularity, possess the power to transfer issues of importance from their own personal agenda to the public agenda. They have the ability to alter the perceptions of people worldwide concerning events and countries. "The power of Hollywood celebrity is best leveraged when it works symbiotically with grassroots efforts. Although the on-the-ground work resonates with communities, celebrities are influence makers, have the star power to turn heads and change minds, and are particularly effective when they are involved early on as active partners in strategy and decision making."[20] They can raise the sympathy levels of almost any cause. Here we are mainly interested in the causes related to China and Tibet and the issue of human rights.

The Dalai Lama's major plan in the 1990s was to internationalize Tibet's cause; therefore, he initiated many contacts with governments, organizations, and media, as well as leading figures in different fields but mainly in the entertainment sector. The Dalai Lama managed to draw the attention of Western singers, writers, actors, directors, and others to the Sino-Tibetan conflict and succeeded in obtaining their strong support. It was Richard Gere's activities and statements that first stimulated Western media and film industry interests in Tibet. Gere's most powerful contributions in launching Tibet's cause within the Western societies could be perceived through three major steps he made to turn Tibet into a hot issue in the media and entertainment sector. First, the establishment of Tibet House, whose main goal is to preserve and promote the Tibetan culture. Second, the organization of the "Year of Tibet" in 1991 with a series of programs and activities of cultural and spiritual weight to reinforce public awareness of Tibet, Tibetans, and Buddhism. Gere put in a huge effort to make the event successful and influential at the political level: "From the outset, Gere conceived of the Year of Tibet as a spectacle in the service of politics. His aim, and the project of Tibet House as a whole, was to stage cultural and religious events and in so doing to transform audiences interested in Buddhism into political supporters."[21] Gere even hired a media consultant to help refine the Dalai Lama's traits and characteristics to fit the recommendations for a public personality and to provide him with the appropriate image throughout the event to produce the right effect on the Tibet movement's political goal.[22] Finally, Gere's speech during the 1993 Academy Awards brought the Tibetan struggle to the forefront of the global debate:

> I was really struck by this idea that there were one billion people watching this thing. It's astonishing—one billion people watching…I wondered if Deng Xiaoping is actually watching this right now, with his children and his grandchildren, and with the knowledge that what a horrendous human-rights situation there is in China, not only towards their own people but to Tibet as well…I wonder if something miraculous, really kind of movie-like, could happen here, where we could all send love and truth and a kind of sanity to Deng Xiaoping right now in

Beijing, that he will take his troops and take the Chinese away from Tibet and allow people to live as free independent people again. So, thought…We send this thought.[23]

Hollywood celebrities have joined Gere in his effort to trigger international awareness of Tibet. They helped the struggle for freedom through their works, speeches, conferences, activities, and impressive public events. One of the most noticeable is the one minute, sixty second public service announcement made in 1997—"Why Are We Silent?" It stars Harrison Ford, Richard Gere, Goldie Hawn, Alanis Morissette, Julia Roberts, Sting, and Adam Yauch reciting portions of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights in support of Tibet. The cinema ad exposes the lovely peaceful face of the Dalai and the smiling Tibetan people against outrageous scenes of Tibetans being brutally tortured. It quotes the following from the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights article 5: "No one should be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment," as well as article 19: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, thoughts, conscious and religion." The ad won several awards and has been shown on television and in theaters in Australia, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa, Tasmania, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It has played in film festivals in New York, Seattle, Telluride, Taos, Palm Springs, Sonoma, Beverly Hills, Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Geneva, Switzerland.

Hollywood and the music industry adopted the "Free Tibet" slogan, which has been used by many movements and organizations to launch pro-Tibet campaigns. "Under the slogan 'Free Tibet' a number of groups worldwide, most prominently the International Tibet Independence Movement and the Indian-based Tibetan Youth Congress, campaign to highlight human rights abuses and alleged discrimination, with the aim of securing an independent Tibet."[24] Hollywood, with three remarkable movies—*Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner*—highlighted the Sino-Tibetan conflict by framing the event within two primary values, freedom and human rights, which the West is well familiar with and considers them as the core of its civilization.

The Hollywood major production companies and community, including Melissa Mathison, Alec Baldwin, Carmen Electra, Barbara Streisand, Todd Oldham, Oliver Stone, Willem Dafoe, Dennis Quaid, Meg Ryan, Robert Thurman, Goldie Hawn, Richard Gere, Allen Ginsburg, Philip Glass, Steven Seagal, Harrison Ford, Sharon Stone, Adam Yuach of the Beastie Boys, Martin Scorsese, Jon Avnet, Disney's Touchstone Pictures, MGM, TriStar Pictures, and many others, are considered to be a tremendous force useful in the process of internationalizing the Tibetan struggle. Hundreds of millions of people in the United States and worldwide have heard the celebrities protest against the occupation of Tibet. These three movies featured here, and many others, have placed it in the universal context of freedom versus oppression and independence versus occupation. This perspective represents the views of many people fighting for freedom for the Tibetan people.

The Sino-Tibetan Conflict from and to Hollywood: The Snowball Effect

Hollywood is a reflection of American and Western views and agendas. One cannot separate the desires of activists from the economic considerations in the movie-making industry. A good reason Hollywood as an institution would support the Tibet cause is because it is good business and also beneficial in creating links with celebrities. While there was a great desire in the 1990s to reach the

untapped Chinese market, China put barriers in front of the Hollywood expansion in the country. They allowed only a few Western movies to be screened each year and did not seriously deal with piracy, making most Hollywood blockbusters available with a simple trip to the open-stall marketplace. The frustration of some major Hollywood companies with Chinese regulations regarding foreign films made them unhesitating to produce movies that challenge the Chinese regime. In the 1990s the goal was to side with Tibet in its struggle, but will this trend hold in the future?

As a reflector of the American public's thoughts, feelings, and culture, Hollywood reinforces themes highlighted by media and politicians; yet Hollywood's most powerful role remains in generating trends and issues for its audience by setting the agenda. This is also what Joseph Nye calls "soft power." It is the power that can be achieved through cultural or commercial success and considerations. Hollywood's adoption of the Tibetan cause in the 1990s dramatically accelerated the wave of movies and documentaries dealing with Tibet, its spiritual and political leader—the Dalai Lama—its religion, culture, and most importantly, its struggle for freedom. This relationship is part of the process of generating cultural hegemony and fighting the Communist-domination narrative that the United States has been dealing with since the end of World War II. While some fight for Tibet for benevolent reasons, others fight because it is part of the economic process or the hegemonic process of great power diplomacy.

The wave of movies related to Tibet accelerated dramatically in the 1990s due to the effort of Hollywood celebrities and the significant contribution of Hollywood production companies. The entertainment and media sectors in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, Netherlands, India, and other countries all over the world got involved with producing and distributing hundreds of movies, mainly documentaries exposing Tibetan issues, such as *Tibet: A Lost Nation* (1989), *Tibet in Exile* (1991), *Heart of Tibet* (1991), *Lost Horizons* (1991), *Compassion in Exile* (1992), *Ancient Futures: Learning From Ladakh* (1993), *In Search of Buddha* (1993), *Satya: A Prayer for the Enemy* (1993), *Human Rights and Moral Practice* (1994), *Dalai Lama—The Soul of Tibet* (1994), *Red Flag Over Tibet* (1994), *Mustang: The Hidden Kingdom* (1994), *Tibet—Communism, Land of the Gods* (1994), *The Good Heart: The 14th Dalai lama Comments on the Four Christian Gospels* (1994), *Shadows Over Tibet: Stories in Exile / Journey to Enlightenment* (1995), *Tibet's Holy Mountain* (1995), *The Cat and the Mouse: China and Tibet* (1995), *Tibetan Book of the Dead, Part 1—A Way of Life* (1996), *The Holy Mountain of Tibet* (1996), *Home to Tibet* (1996), *Strange Spirit—One Country's Occupation* (1997), *The Saltmen of Tibet / Die Salzmanner von Tibet* (1997), *Dreams of Tibet* (1997), *Kingdom of the Lost Boy* (1997), *Sacred Heart of Asia* (1998), *In Search of Kundun with Martin Scorsese* (1998), *Missing in Tibet* (1998), *Journey inside Tibet* (1999), *Tibet's Stolen Child* (2000), *In Search of History: Tibet's Lost Paradise—Shangri-la* (2000), *Seven Dreams of Tibet* (2001), and *Tibet—Cry of the Snow Lion* (2003). All these movies follow an agenda laid out by both activists and politicians. There is no clash between culture and politics; these issues walk on the same side of the street.

Goodwill toward Tibet from Hollywood reached its peak with the release of *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet*. These releases were followed by several strong, fictional non-Hollywood films produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s that followed the narrative themes we have laid out here. China is evil, backward, and imperialistic, while Tibet is benevolent, mystical, and spiritual. Movies such as *Windhorse* (1998), *The Cup* (*Phörpa*; 1999), *Himalaya—l' Enfance d'un Chef* (also known as *Caravan*; 1999), and *Samsara* (2001) continue these themes. The support of small films like *The*

Cup only demonstrates the fixed nature of Western perceptions and perspectives. We should expect a new wave of such films after the rebellions and immolations in Tibet during the early 2010s, but for reasons we will note later, this development is unlikely and the focus is now on China's economic potential rather than their failings in the arena of human rights and Tibet.

Chapter 5
Political Messages and Cultural Realities

Modern China and Tibet in the Hollywood Image

Modern Western views of Tibet tend to be constructed through a complicated interaction between the media, Tibetan exiles, celebrity activists, and resurgent Buddhism to form a power collective of what is considered to be the Free Tibet movement. Of particular interest is the exclusion of anyone who actually lives in Tibet from this interaction. Images of Tibet are created through the diaspora movement and mythical films rather than realistic portrayals in the news or cinema. The goal is to create a political movement rather than a realistic view of the region and its culture. As Meg McLagan notes, "It is a mode of mobilization that combines cultural spectacle, celebrity, and media to powerful effect, one that has become an increasingly significant means through which diasporic, indigenous and other marginalized groups make political claims and construct their collective identity in the post war era."[1] How did we get to this point?

Hollywood filmmakers have been applying cinematographic language to the rich cultural tapestry of Tibetans to advance political claims and goals suggested by activists and supporters of Tibet in the West. Tibet is more likely to be mythologized than realistically portrayed as a place of multiple constituencies and desires. It is a political tool for some, an object of fascination for others. The important side effect of this movement is the rich filmmaking playground that has resulted in some stunning films and documentaries. The common theme of most movies set in Tibet is to objectify the culture and demonize those who seek to destroy it. On the one hand, the side effect may be the loss of culture for Tibetans as China asserts its dominance, but on the other hand, the perspective will live on in the form of artistic and visual achievements of modern film.

In this chapter we will analyze the process of constructing a political view of Tibet and China. The goal of Hollywood actors is to advance freedom from tyranny. Movies such as *Kundun*, *Red Corner*, and *Seven Years in Tibet* seek to put pressure on China to make changes to their political process and to accommodate diverse voices. Such movies seek to raise the global awareness of the question of Tibet's status and to connect these issues to the global human rights project. We will examine the process behind this complicated and constructed view of modern Tibet, China, and their prolonged conflict.

The Power of Movies to Defy China

Kundun, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner* emerge out of a period of intense contestation at the rise of China as a superpower. The goal of the movies released in the late 1990s was to challenge China's authority and perspective. China's goal of presenting a unified and powerful modern state was confronted by the mythical nature of Tibetan culture. In the same vein, it was feared that Hong Kong and Taiwan would also be effectively colonized by imperial masters much in the same way the West viewed China's takeover of Tibet. Hollywood's vision challenged the unified narrative the Chinese were trying to put forth and to this day continues to have a devastating effect of making China the enemy of liberalism. This is the modern Yellow Peril. The idea is that China will take over slowly (or quickly, depending on perspective), crushing the West and liberalism through economic might rather than with hordes of soldiers.

The PRC government has always considered any attempt to support Tibetan independence as a hostile act aiming to weaken China and destroy its image worldwide. From the Chinese point of view, all activities in the West to support Tibet only embolden their view that the West is doing all it can to prevent China from becoming a great power and achieving territorial integrity. Cultural support and material support from such groups as the CIA only enhance this perception.[2] In this way, the art used to express support for Tibet becomes a political action. The dividing line between art and culture is blurred when Hollywood confronts China.

China's Political and Economic Situation

The PRC government has always considered that Chinese interests are best protected through internal unity and stabilization. The path to stability is through internal self reliance rather than outside help. China had to cope with three major events in the 1990s, which were regarded as turning points in the country's history. These events had a profound impact on the country and its future and were also important tests of the doctrine of self-reliance.

The first milestone occurred in 1996 when Taiwan held its first-ever democratic presidential elections. Even though the PRC government threatened to use armed force against Taiwan if it proceeded with its strategy, it failed to intimidate the Taiwanese voters; voter turnout was steady and Lee Teng-hui was elected president. This act has been regarded by the Chinese authorities as an informal declaration of Taiwan's democracy and independence from China.

The second milestone occurred in 1997 when Hong Kong was handed over to China, ending more than 150 years of rule by the United Kingdom. This is one of the few peaceful transitions of territory by one state to another. The agreement between the United Kingdom and China outlines PRC government control over defense and international affairs, while Hong Kong retains autonomous control over the internal affairs of the territory. Public opinion in Hong Kong was divided between those who welcomed this step and those who resented it, mainly due to fear of Communist reforms, which can come with a curtailment of individual rights and a high level of corruption when compared to the British system. One of the biggest concerns for the PRC government was to improve China's image in hopes of making the integration of Hong Kong people in the Chinese community smooth and effective.

The third challenge to China was from the realm of human rights concerns and democratic advancement in light of the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. The PRC government was also facing internal and international pressures regarding the issue of Tibet. The US government, along with the

United Nations, used their influence to force China to hold talks with the Dalai Lama and to improve the human rights conditions in Tibet. Moreover, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lhasa became subject to great disturbances that developed into riots; several demonstrations took place in the streets and many monks, nuns, and Tibetans were arrested.

The 1990s were dominated by human rights concerns, but the Chinese leadership would have rather focused on economic reforms and modernization. The PRC government proceeded with the reforms it started in the 1980s to modernize China and to restore its image worldwide to attract investment and to enter the World Trade Organization. The economic liberalization policy that the government adopted at that time led to tremendous economic growth. China emerged as a global economic power and by 2010 was considered the most likely state to interrupt the global hegemony of the United States. The 1990s were a period of great growth for China and by the 2000s there could be no doubt that China was well past the point of becoming a great power. The only question remaining was how long this period of growth could be sustained and just how powerful China would become.

Yet China's true problem in the 1990s was the alarming human rights situation at the internal and international levels. China's human rights crisis reignited in 1989 with the demonstration of thousands of students in Beijing streets calling for freedom and democracy. This demonstration led to bloody confrontations between the Chinese forces and the young protesters. Hundreds died and thousands were wounded or arrested, and many were imprisoned. The Chinese government admits the death of 241 people.[3] Moreover, the severe measures the Chinese government applied to crush those in Tiananmen Square generated strong Western hostility against the Communist regime and produced disastrous effects on the country through strong sanctions:

> The European Union reacted with a series of sanctions, including postponement of new cooperation projects, suspension of high level ministerial contacts, and interruption of military cooperation. The US reacted with similar measures, and started to link China's "most-favored-nation" status to the respect of human rights and democracy…In the years directly following the Tiananmen-incident, the international community kept up the pressure. Both European countries and the US supported China-critical resolutions in the UN Human Rights Commission, and mostly concentrated on economic measures to improve the human rights situation in China. The UN Sub-commission for human rights adopted a second anti-China resolution in 1991, this time criticizing the human rights situation in Tibet.[4]

To cope with the situation, China released a series of White Papers that is still published into the present to improve its image and defend the human rights situation in the country: "The government published the first White Paper in 1991 on human rights to defend and promote China's human rights regime towards the international community, and towards its own population."[5] The White Papers contributed in creating more favorable conditions for China at the international level, as they provided information and justification that made it possible for many countries to develop a more comprehensive attitude toward China's human rights policy. In short, some countries were able to look beyond the spectacular incidents, such as the Tiananmen Square confrontation, with the use of such public relations measures. Two decades later these incidents are almost forgotten and human rights violations, as perceived by the West, get little attention compared to the situation in the Middle

East and Africa.

To project a positive attitude toward the international community, the PRC government took several additional steps in the 1990s to improve the human rights situation; the most notable one is the signing of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights in October 1998. Also, reforms that the government initiated reached the judicial system as a serious attempt to create a favorable environment for investment. Corruption is taken seriously and often punished by death. Regardless, corruption, mistreatment of prisoners, and the excessive use of the death penalty continues to prevail. Providing the context for the situation in the 1990s now allows us to more fully explore the relationship among China, Tibet, and Hollywood during this era. The focus will be on the three films mentioned previously: *Kundun*, *Red Corner*, and *Seven Years in Tibet*.

Mr. Smith Goes to China and Tibet

Kundun, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner* were viewed by the Chinese authorities as a great challenge and incitement to their rule. These movies made no secret of the fact that they aimed to intensify the internal divisions within China and in the international community. These movies were meant to contribute to the criticism of China as a state after the various human rights disasters that plagued the country in the 1990s and into the 2000s. Much like the classic Hollywood movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, the goal was to show that the little common man can have a great impact on the course of human events. A man with little power can stand up to the system and state.

The three movies that are the focus of this chapter all have elements of “Mr. Smith” in them and thus were provocative to the Chinese government. First, *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* strongly reinforce the destructive image of the Chinese state. The great oppression the PRC government had been exerting against Tibet and its catastrophic consequences on the Tibetan people and their unique culture are featured in *Seven Years in Tibet*, while *Kundun* is a more subversive criticism of the Communist state. In both cases, the Dalai Lama is that little man who can cause great reform.

The themes and issues of death, destruction of culture, migration, and human rights abuses are revealed throughout *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* in some powerful visual scenes and also in influential dialogue moments. In a scene in *Kundun*, the Dalai Lama sees a vision of blue water where fishes are moving serenely, and suddenly blood starts to infiltrate the water and turns it all red. The vision progresses dramatically to shock the viewer with the Dalai Lama looking around him at the most savage massacre in modern history, where thousands of Tibetan corpses lie down next to each other all covered with blood. There is no subtlety here; China and the red menace represent both Communism and death to the Tibetan state. *Seven Years in Tibet*, on the other hand, put the massacres in a more realistic framework and ends with a documentary-like shot where words appear on the screen claiming the death of one million Tibetans and the destruction of thousands of monasteries as a result of the Chinese occupation. The movie depicts the four most outrageous images of Chinese performance in Tibet that Colin Mackerras mentions in his book *Western Images of China*: “The first, that over a million Tibetans have died as a result of Chinese occupation. The second, that China is destroying Tibetan culture in a process leading towards cultural genocide. A third view is that the Tibetan areas are becoming ‘swamped’ by Han Chinese in a process making Tibetans a minority in their own country. Finally, there is a widespread view in the West, which argues that China is suppressing religion in Tibet and practicing ghastly human rights abuses in the process.”[6]

Each of the three 1990s movies in its own way tackles the human rights issue, emphasizing the negative aspects of Chinese rule. In *Red Corner*, Avnet picks up and overstates the negative aspect of the Chinese law. The movie unmercifully attacks the Chinese government, describing its judicial system as extremely corrupt and humiliating. The most impressive scene, one that echoes China's violation of human rights and excessive use of the death penalty, is when Jack (Gere) is with his female lawyer (Shen Yuelin), who is trying to convince him to plead guilty on "moral grounds":

JACK: I'm not pleading guilty!

SHEN: If you plead not guilty, the judge and the two members of the public sitting with her will be offended by your unrepentant attitude. Their majority vote will determine your fate. In our country, moral education of criminals is of great importance. Leniency is granted to those who confess. Severity is required for those who insist on their innocence. Therefore it would be wise of you to treat our legal system with respect.

JACK: Spare me the lecture on the morality of your judicial system.

SHEN: If you plead not guilty, you will be sentenced to death. And, unlike in your country, sentences are carried out within a week. You will be shot, and the cost of the bullet billed to your family.

Cinematic Contribution to Tibet's International Campaign

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* aim to offer support to the Tibetan people at a time when most of the governments of the Western world, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, looked the other way. To the international community, Tibet is an internal Chinese question requiring internal solutions to the problem. Some feel that through time the pressure on Tibet will lessen; others only hope to not antagonize the resurgent power. Tibetans in exile found through these Hollywood movies and various other endeavors (such as the Tibetan Freedom concerts starting in 1998) a way to defend and publicize their cause; the movies held high hopes for stirring up universal support for Tibet that could contribute to ending the suffering of the Tibetans and bringing peace and sovereignty to their country.

> With its global economic reach and its ability to animate popular sentiment around the world, was not Hollywood more omnipresent and mighty than even the American military? Compelling big screen scenes of the halcyon days of Tibet, it was hoped, might somehow force the issue of what was lost onto the American foreign policy agenda for the first time in decades…Among many exiled Tibetans there arose an almost millenarian hope that the release of these films and the identification with Tibet of such pop icons as Martin Scorsese, Steven Seagal, Brad Pitt, Richard Gere, and the Beastie Boys might precipitate the long-awaited moment when China would feel compelled by the power of the world opinion to address the question of Tibet in a more humane and conciliatory way.[7]

Tibet's Political and Economic Situation

The government of Tibet in exile has always considered that Tibet is an independent nation with a unique culture and place in this world. For them, putting an end to the Chinese occupation and bringing Tibet back to a place of peace and freedom remains the major concern. There are divergent views within the community as to how best to accomplish this task. Some want full independence with an armed movement; others suggest peaceful resistance and autonomy.

The Dalai Lama recognized the importance of building large-scale awareness regarding the Tibet struggle; therefore, his major plan in the 1990s aimed to present this struggle to diverse audiences. The Dalai Lama sought to strengthen his connection with governments and organizations holding the power to influence the decision making in China and worldwide. His visit to the United States and his meeting with President George Bush in 1991 gave a strong push toward reactivating negotiations between Tibet and China and put Tibet at the top of the US foreign affairs agenda for a short period. The Dalai Lama's reception in Washington was followed by first-time meetings with many officials, heads of government, and heads of state in several countries, including a reception by the British prime minister on December 2, 1991.[8] Moreover, the Western media provided massive coverage for the Tibetan leader's activities as well as the disturbances inside Tibet.

Nevertheless, the greatest assistance Tibet received was from the Western celebrities and tastemakers who made a significant contribution to the implementation of the Dalai Lama's political strategy by using their talents and reputation to launch his thoughts and beliefs all over the world; the question still remains how effective this strategy was. The conflict between China and Tibet has gained a new dimension with additional focus on the invasion of the soul, mind, and culture by the Chinese. Tsering Shakya notes, "More importantly the campaign also emphasized the preservation of Tibet's unique cultural tradition. The Dalai Lama and the exiled Tibetans were promoted as the guardians of a 2,000–year-old civilization, while the Chinese were portrayed as the destroyers of this unique culture."[9] The cultural shift in the international lobbying effort had a positive effect on the movement overall, but a lasting impact remains to be seen.

The international campaign that the Dalai Lama set off through his own charisma and changes in strategy motivated the Tibetans and inspired them to further intensify their resistance. Several demonstrations took place in Lhasa, asking for Tibetan freedom. The response from the Chinese authorities was swift and typical. Tibetans were asked to deny the Dalai Lama and reject that he spoke for the people of Tibet. Unfortunately for China, the deification of the Dalai Lama likely only increased once his leadership was banned.

Perhaps the most interesting development was that the PRC government began to establish the "socialist spiritual civilization" that would replace the Buddhist society that dominated Tibet and was a source of its magnetism. The government launched the Patriotic Education Campaign that aimed mainly to convert the monks and nuns to spiritual socialism: "Between 1996 and 1999, more than 11,000 monks and nuns were expelled from their institutions, and over 500 were arrested. Once expelled, it is almost impossible to find employment. By March 1998, 35,000 monks and nuns in more than 700 religious institutions had been supposedly rectified by patriotic education."[10] The Chinese government restrictions and social changes have only entrenched Buddhist society more, as resistance is the likely outcome to such social engineering.

At the same time, Tibet witnessed in the 1990s a rapid economic growth, which had simultaneous negative and positive effects upon the Tibetan society. The Chinese government had an effective role in modernizing and reforming the Tibetan economic system, which, being of a feudal nature, was

something few would deny needed improvement. In 1995, the Tibet Work Forum declared the initiation of 62 construction projects, at a cost of $270 million, in different technological, agricultural, and environmental fields as well as social development. The technological and economic progress contributed to improving the standard of living of the Tibetan citizens. However, the implementation of these projects required the transportation of a great number of Chinese workers, which had a dramatic effect on the demography in Tibet. While accurate numbers are hard to find, the growth of in-migration to Tibet has been massive and threatens to overwhelm Tibet. The Dalai Lama severely condemned the huge migration of Han Chinese, accusing the PRC government of trying to swamp the Tibetans and destroy their unique culture. The Dalai Lama also claimed that the Tibetans still suffered from poverty and starvation while the Han were the ones who benefitted the most from the economic evolution of Tibet.

Considering the point of views of both parties, it is no secret that Chinese economic projects in Tibet "indicate China's policy to resolve the Tibet and Xinjiang issues by means of economic development and the consequent influx of Han Chinese."[11] The Chinese government restrictions, Patriotic Education Campaign, and economic development plan favor, as Warren Smith implies in his book *China's Tibet? Autonomy or Assimilation*, the view of Tibetan submission to China rather than Tibetan autonomy: "Since 1989, China has instituted a policy in Tibet of restrictions on all aspects of Tibetan cultural and political autonomy that have nationalist implications, which effectively means almost all aspects of autonomy. This has been combined with continuous repression of opposition, patriotic education campaigns, and economic development that buys the compliance of some Tibetans but also supports Chinese colonization."[12]

The Movies' Political Stands vis-à-vis Tibet Issues

The main goal of *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* is to defend Tibet's right to self-determination; the idea that the people give consent to be ruled and have a say in what style of government the state will operate under. Because of this ulterior motive, they depict history and events in a way that match with their aspirations as opposed to striving for accuracy. These movies provide a significant support to the Dalai Lama and his nonviolent resistance members also supporting the idea of Tibet as a glorious culture deserving respect.

The two Hollywood movies orchestrate their content according to the Dalai Lama's political strategy of internationalizing the Tibetan struggle for freedom. The struggle for Tibet is given a universal perspective; it is represented as a struggle between humanity and the goodness of mankind versus the evil nature of authoritarianism. In *Kundun*, Scorsese carefully pulls the conflict between China and Tibet out of its real context to give it a universal meaning, extending beyond the limit of time and place, good vs. evil, and God vs. Devil. The Tibetans' struggle against China is portrayed as the struggle of the spiritual world against annihilation. The fight between good and evil is best revealed in two powerful paradoxical scenes. There is a scene in which Reting Rinpoche explains to Kundun his duties as a Dalai Lama: "Your job is simple. You are to love all living things. Just love them. Care for them. Have compassion for them. As long as any living thing draws breath, wherever he shall be, there in compassion, shall the Buddha appear." This absolute love and compassion scene is brutally juxtaposed by the scene where Chairman Mao reveals his discontent toward religion upon his meeting with the Dalai Lama.

Chairman Mao: You have lots to learn, how to draw out people's opinions and make decisions. Instruct your young Tibetans…

Dalai Lama: Very good, I agree with some of your ideas. For years, we have been reforming our monasteries and reorganizing.

Chairman Mao: Your attitude is good; you know I understand you well. But you need to learn this Religion is poison…poison. Like a poison it weakens the race. Like a drug it retards the mind of people and society; the opium of the people. Tibet has been poisoned by religion and your people are poisoned and inferior.

There is no hidden message implied in this scene. It repeats Karl Marx's famous dictate that religion is the opiate of the masses and pushes this theme toward the Buddhist people, whose religion is more of a way of life rather than a spiritual guidebook. Mao's mistake is to assume that religion can be rooted out of human society. In fact, it is a central part of the daily life of most Tibetans. To not understand this point demonstrates why China has failed to subdue the Buddhists and why the movement has only gained strength through time.

The two movies also aim to draw the attention of the West to a sacred land and its unique culture, a continual theme in movies dealing with Tibet. *Kundun* depicts, with great detail, the divine nature of Tibet that merges wonderfully with the Dalai Lama's sanctity. The wonderful settings and views—interweaving mountains, stone monasteries, and the elevated Potala Palace—along with stunning costumes and amazing music are mixed with the voices of the monks chanting oracles. All these sacred places and voices lead the viewer to a Buddha who had been reborn to bring love and compassion to the world. *Seven Years in Tibet* on the other hand focuses mainly on Tibet's unique culture. The movie introduces the viewer to a very simple way of life, where people are humble and poor, yet they live happily and in harmony with nature. Once again, anything having to do with Tibet is represented as ethereal while those in opposition are shown to be evil at the core.

As a final point, *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* concretize visually and verbally the idea of a free Tibet. They include historical facts, which make it difficult for the viewers to resist the filmmakers' point of view, but also obscure the facts to push the theme forward. Both movies draw the position of China as a conqueror, Tibet as occupied nation, and the Dalai Lama as the spiritual leader and ruler of Tibet. The movies mainly show that the situation of China in Tibet is a devastating occupation. Many scenes strengthen the idea of occupation, and one of them is in *Kundun* when the Lord Chamberlain opens a yellowing letter left by the thirteenth Dalai Lama to his successor and begins to read while Kundun sits down beside him:

Lord Chamberlain (reading the letter): When I reached the age of 18, I was called upon to accept the responsibility of serving as spiritual and secular head of the country. The responsibility was by no means small, and it weighed heavily upon my mind, and then the Chinese invaded. There was really nothing we could do other than pray. Our prayers were soon answered, for the power of truth is great and karma infallible. We routed the Chinese out. It may happen, that here in Tibet, religion and government will be attacked, the monasteries will be looted and destroyed and the monks and nuns killed or chased away. We will become slaves to our conquerors and wander helplessly like beggars. The days and nights will pass slowly and with great suffering and terror.

Rising Global Awareness about the Dalai Lama's Spiritual and Political Role

The PRC government has for a long time considered the Dalai Lama as a dangerous and powerful opponent posing a major threat to its control of Tibet. He is accused by the Chinese of being a traitor, working to separate Tibet from mainland China. In the 1990s, the PRC government, enraged by the growing popularity of the Dalai Lama, held him responsible for the internal troubles in Tibet. Moving into the 2010s, nothing has really changed.

Tensions between China and the Dalai Lama developed further regarding the identity of the new Panchen Lama (second-highest reincarnation after the Dalai Lama). With the death of the tenth Panchen Lama, a search started for a substitute, and two Panchen Lamas were selected. The Chinese authorities imprisoned the eleventh Panchen Lama selected by the Dalai Lama and proclaimed their own Lama, who was enthroned in 1995. The selection of a new Panchen Lama has strong political significance, as it could determine the future of the Sino-Tibetan conflict, setting up an internal conflict within the Buddhist organization and clouding the authority lines that run directly to the Dalai Lama. In 1997, the Dalai Lama further inflamed tensions by paying a visit to Taiwan; the PRC government described this as another conspiracy to split China apart.

The Dalai Lama, despite his proclamations of peaceful intentions, poses a great risk to the Chinese authorities. He is a scared figure among all Tibetans; his picture is in the home of everyone from the region. Through simply a visit, his defiance of Chinese power can shake the foundations of the establishment. His visits to the United States, Taiwan, and other locations have upset China as much as any other event in the international system. The final point that upsets the Chinese most of all is the reverence and respect the Dalai Lama is granted throughout the world. He is a celebrity that no one in the Eastern world can match in stature and status. His presence alone changed the careers of many actors, authors, filmmakers, and musicians. Through their tireless work, millions are now aware of the Tibetan cause and implicate the Chinese for a whole host of violations to the right of life. It is safe to say that until his death, and even after it, China will do all that is in its power to nullify the reverence and respect given to this man who defies them so much.

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* glorify China's first and perhaps most dangerous enemy. By his mere existence, the Dalai Lama challenges the idea of absolute rule by the Chinese. Both movies portray the fourteenth Dalai Lama as a god/king and a divine being holding absolute love, peace, and wisdom within his grasp. They represent the Dalai Lama as the spiritual as well as the political leader of Tibet, declaring him as the head of the Tibetan government and the only one authorized to speak on the behalf of Tibet and the Tibetans. The declaration of the government of Tibet in exile takes place in *Kundun* through a scene showing the Dalai Lama and a voice-over stating, "We repudiate the Seventeen Point Agreement. We constitute a temporary government of Tibet, the only legal authority in the land." Most importantly, the movie shows that the Dalai Lama is Tibet and reveals artistically the fusion of Dalai Lama life and the Tibetan cause. Moreover, *Kundun* highlights the identity of the fourteenth Dalai Lama and represents him as the reincarnation of the Buddha of Compassion. The movie also shows that the Lamas are the only legitimate authority entitled to select a High Lama and explains that this selection is spiritual and not political (an obvious nod to China's own desire to upend this process); the selected Dalai Lama should prove through an identification test

that he is the reincarnation of the preceding Dalai Lama.

These movies, and others of the sort, like *The Golden Child*, serve to remind the people that there is no absolute rule in Tibet. There remains a man and others who will defy Chinese authorities in the name of justice and culture. Making a movie to simply support the Dalai Lama is no simple process; it entails rejecting the totality of Chinese rule and control in the region. Simple acts of art are not simple when made in this political space. To think that support of the culture or religion of Tibet means anything other than defying Chinese power ignores the setting and political context of the time.

Advancing the Tibetan Cause over China-United States Relations

The three Hollywood movies that serve as the focus of this chapter—mainly *Red Corner*—aim to enlighten Americans of the consequences of developing a strong relationship with China. The three movies were released in 1997, the same year President Jiang Zemin paid a visit to the United States, the first by a Chinese President in 12 years.

China-US relations started formally two hundred years ago with the Qing dynasty. Much of the Asian world was off limits to the West and particularly America as the colonial moment ended and states focused on self-sufficiency. China and the United States never were close until world events managed to make them great allies during World War II and potentially deadly enemies in the future.

The British and Chinese were allied through simple location dynamics. The colonies of the United Kingdom stretched into Asia and they maintained control of Hong Kong well into the 1990s. With the British mostly distracted by the Nazis in Europe, the United States was tasked by the empire with maintaining the West's grasp over Asia during World War II. After much stuttering, the United States was able to turn the tide and defeat the Japanese. The Chinese also managed to develop an effective fighting force led by Mao Zedong under the auspicious Communist-style system. His rival, Chiang Kai-Shek, preferred a more nationalistic and traditional authoritarian form of governance. The defeat of the Japanese left these two enemies dueling over who would control China. The Communists won and the Nationalists fled to Taiwan. The West sided with the Nationalists against the Communists because the main geopolitical enemy at the time was the Soviet Union, and this choice was necessary according to the global narrative.

This development left the West at odds with China based simply on who was the enemy of the United States. China sided with and perhaps drove the North Koreans toward invasion of South Korea in the 1950s. This sparked a direct conflict between the United States and China as American forces got too close to the Chinese border. The intervention of the Chinese forces on the side of their Communist allies pushed the war toward a bloody and permanent stalemate. Tensions between China and the United States remained high until the 1970s when Richard Nixon "opened" China through rapprochement.

This act of reconciliation was not a move driven by good intentions or remorse but driven out of the geopolitical realities at the time. The United States was stuck in Vietnam with no viable exit plan, and the Chinese offered a way out as a way to balance competing interests in the area. The Chinese were also at odds with the Soviet Union over the course of Communism, and the Chinese served as useful allies against the Soviet presence. Relations cooled until the 1990s with the encroachment of globalization.

The main foreign policy interest of the United States in the 1990s was to enter the Chinese market

while providing the best environment to secure American investments. The end of the Cold War provided for a new impetus for economic progress, and China was a ripe market left for exploitation. Chinese economic growth attracted foreign investments, and American companies were eager to join the "gold rush." In 1997 "there were 23,800 US-funded projects with a total investment of more than 16 billion dollars."[13] China claimed that the United States is the second biggest foreign investor after Japan.

Even though the US government was eager to build a healthy relationship with China, some were very concerned about the PRC government's performance and its constant violation of human rights throughout its country and territories. Americans in general recognize the benefits of a strong and healthy relationship with China and the gain the United States may achieve out of this relationship, mainly through trade and investment. The main goal is to change the balance of trade in favor of the United States. However, many insist that the United States should push the Chinese government toward respecting human rights norms and conventions it otherwise chooses to ignore. These two visions are clearly at odds with each other. How can a state both seek openness and trade and also chastise its partner for its ill-timed violations of basic human needs? In the 1990s, film and music were used to take an active stand against China and its policies. In the 2000s, the tone is much more balanced since China has succeeded in making its growth trajectory explosive. Our interest remains in the 1990s, with the active insolence of the artistic community and the passions Tibet invoked at the time.

Kundun, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner* form the cinematographic core protest of some of the most remarkable Hollywood people, such as Martin Scorsese, Richard Gere, Jon Avnet, and Melissa Mathison, against the policy of the US government. They have sought through artistic means to condemn China for its actions and also the United States for failing to act responsibly. Clearly the US government has chosen to take a weak stance against China's human rights violations to maintain a healthy economic relationship. In Gere's *Red Corner*, American officials were reluctant to provide help to the innocent American businessman so as not to jeopardize the trade negotiations between the United States and China, an obvious reference to President Clinton's refusal to put overwhelming pressure on the Chinese government to improve its performance regarding human rights.

While *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* send barely hidden messages to the US audience, messages in the *Red Corner* are very obvious and straightforward; they are effectively revealed visually as well as verbally throughout the movie. Gere points out in many scenes that the US government is unable to provide sufficient protection to the American people in Chinese territory. This is an obvious point that most would assume, but it becomes a pointed fact in relation to China. During Gere's detention, the American embassy stood helpless in providing any kind of support to the American. We often hear the senior consular officer at the American embassy telling Gere that there is nothing he can do to save him. Yet the most impressive scene that sums up the entire situation is at the end of the movie when the American consul general tells Gere that the American embassy was seeking his release, and Gere smiles sarcastically at him saying, "You really believe this shit, don't you?" Gere point-blank refers to the sinister fact that the relationship between China and the United States is not one based on rights or respect but on economics and exploitation.

In the movie, Gere addresses not only the US government but the American business community as well. *Red Corner* exposes the difficulties that a businessman faces in China and shows that the violations of human rights and corruption in the judicial system jeopardize the foreign investment

project in China. Can there be true investment and capitalism if there are no legal and moral systems in place to make these agreements work?

Red Corner is the movie that Gere used to point the finger at the Chinese Communist regime as well as to attack both President Clinton and the US government for continuing a good relationship with China while ignoring the Communist country's continuous violation of human rights. Gere said, following a Washington, DC, screening of his film, "We're not going to pretend this is a new, cuddly Communist Chinese government we have here…We've had a president who has been neither clear nor firm on China's human rights since the very beginning and that waffling…has sent a message of weakness."[14] Moreover, producer Jon Avnet projects his own stance as an American citizen. He states, "If we're going to talk about MFN, we're going to talk about WTO and membership; if we're going to talk about treating China as an equal, then these things have to be factored into political decisions. It cannot just be, you know, the laissez-faire capitalism of the early 1900s. You know and nor should we support a regime any more than we should have supported Hitler in Germany or you know what was going on in Bosnia with silence or with economic aid to one party."[15]

The reaction of the Chinese and US authorities to these movies and celebrities engaged in their making is problematic, as both considered them harmful to their political strategies. The anti-China movies and Tibet-activist celebrities caused diplomatic embarrassment to the United States on several occasions, including the release of *Red Corner* during the arrival of the Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Washington. President Clinton asked MGM to delay the release of the movie until after the visit of the Chinese president.[16] Hollywood's engagement in the Sino-Tibetan conflict also has raised the anger of some American diplomats; Henry Kissinger, who played a major role in initiating contacts with China as secretary of state in the administration of President Nixon, showed on several occasions his discontent with Richard Gere and declared that "Gere is a better actor than he is a political analyst."[17] However, the Chinese government has different interpretations of Hollywood's anti-China movies and campaigns and considers them as a part of the American government's plan to keep China's profile low within the Western societies. The Chinese media accused *Red Corner* and other films produced with that same spirit of supporting US political plans by enhancing the Americans' hostility and hatred against China. The *Beijing Youth Daily* declared, "In the United States movies like *Red Corner* would aid American authorities in creating anti-China tide within their own market."[18]

Overall, it is clear that these films are political tools exposing the perspective of the makers. Some in the United States are not happy with the choice of economy and business over human rights and culture. These feelings resulted in a few films at the time that challenged Chinese authority. These films are intended to serve two good causes—Tibet's cause and the global human rights project—but they remain biased and historically inaccurate. The response by China has been effective in muting their concerns, as we will demonstrate in the next few chapters.

Chapter 6
Accuracy versus Propaganda in Hollywood Cinema

False Depictions of China, Tibet, and Their Protracted Conflict

Hollywood movies such as *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner* reveal partial truths about China and Tibet. Most importantly, these films, and others of the sort, reveal much more about the makers of the films and audience receiving them than they do regarding the subject. The mingling of fiction and fact in cinematic art produces a distorted reality; fiction is represented as fact and facts are represented as fiction. The three remarkable movies made in 1997, at the height of global awareness of Tibet and criticism of China, all have a similar objective—to make a political point. They are propaganda films made during a crisis to demoralize the enemy and mobilize hatred against them while also seeking the cooperation of friends and neutrals.

This chapter will examine the interplay between fact and fiction in these movies so as to understand the complete motivations behind the films. What do they say about the filmmakers and audience? Do these films reflect grand trends, or are they a result of a particular time? Will this style of fantastical storytelling revolving around geopolitical issues endure?

China: Facts and Fiction

Despite thousands of years of culture and civilization development, China is only recently becoming the global power and object of fascination matching its size and ambitions. China has emerged today as a global power due to its significant economic growth, large population, and remarkable sense of industry. Therefore, it would be difficult for any movie to examine its long history, its complex ethnic structure, and its political system in a nuanced manner. *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner* focus on a short period of Chinese history and depict what the Westerners consider two major deficiencies in the PRC government performance: its policy regarding Tibet and its violation of human rights. These themes dominate the movies made at the time and result in inaccuracies made in favor of advancing the liberation theme.

Depiction of History and Dramatic Events in the Movies

Chinese territory was inhabited by humans one million years ago; its documented history goes back over five thousand years. It witnessed a glorious past as one of the most sophisticated cultures and cosmopolitan civilizations in the world. Until the nineteenth century, China was considered a great power that managed to build an advanced society and strong economic system. Throughout history, China's vital yet cautious interaction with the outside has contributed to the development of technology and organizational achievements throughout the world. These interactions allowed China to benefit from Western progress as well. China produced paper, the printing press, gunpowder, porcelain, and the compass. At the same time, it took in other cultural and scientific advances from the West and East.[1]

In the nineteenth century, China's Qing dynasty started to collapse under the pressure of internal revolutions and the Anglo-Chinese War. The war between Britain and China broke out in 1839 and ended with the defeat of China. The Qing government was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanjing, which weakened China, forcing the government to hand over Hong Kong to Britain and to pay a huge amount of compensation as war costs. The treaty also committed China to open its markets to British goods. This development had the parallel importance of linking China to the United Kingdom and also making the country regress internally, fearing interactions with other Western states.

In 1911 the Chinese Nationalists took over control of the government but failed to maintain stability. China witnessed great disturbances due to foreign intrusions, Japanese invasion, and civil war between the Communists and the Nationalist regime. The Nationalist regime entered China into a deeper period of regression. The great power fell from its great heights to a nation that could do little to protect its own territory or institutions. It is crucial to note that the Japanese invasion of China, which began in the early 1930s, had devastating consequences upon the country's development and progress. Tens of millions were killed while many more went missing or lost the will to build a country in the face of such hopeless odds.[2]

Not all the blame for retarding the growth of civilization can be placed on the Japanese or the West. In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party took power from the Nationalists and imposed severe rules on the citizens, proclaiming the state's ownership of land, industries, and the means of production. In the following years, the Communist Party took control of Tibet after several bloody attacks during which thousands of Tibetans were killed.

In the 1950s, the Chinese government initiated an economic system modeled on a central planned economy to control the economic sector, deciding production, pricing, and distribution of goods and services at the national level. Later, the government set off the Great Leap Forward campaign (announced in 1957) to increase China's agricultural production while maintaining high industrial growth. The main goal of this campaign was to make the country self-sufficient so it would be possible to compete with the outside world. Unfortunately, the consequence of the Great Leap Forward was a complete collapse of agricultural and industrial production for years, and death by starvation of 16 to 45 million people.

The main reason for the failure of the Great Leap Forward was the commune system, which misapplied general guidelines to local situations. The collective organization was made to meet goals and demands it was incapable of handling. Either the work was done of such a poor quality it failed to endure, or the system collapsed entirely as commune leaders were cycled in and out in hopes of finding a solution. This, combined with poor weather and a rationing system, led to the starvation of millions and set growth back for decades.

In 1966, Chairman Mao initiated the Cultural Revolution program to cope with political and ideological chaos, as well as the tragic deterioration of China at the economic and social level. The Cultural Revolution had devastating consequences on the country. A great number of monasteries, as well as traditional Chinese cultural and historical sites, were destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people were arrested, tortured, raped, persecuted, executed, starved to death, or subjected to all kinds of harassment and abuse. As Jiaqi Yan and Gao Gao note, "For China, the Cultural Revolution remains a colossal catastrophe in which human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and civilization itself were unprecedentedly trampled…Culture was devastated, and the economy almost collapsed, falling 500 billion Yuan short of the production plan."[3]

To compensate for its dramatic failure in implementing economic reconstruction and the continued failure of the Cultural Revolution program, the Communist Party found itself in the late 1970s forced to adopt reforms in all aspects. The reforms started in the party itself and continued to reach over to the areas of government organization, politics, economics, military, and culture.

The Chinese government in the 1980s opened the door to the modernization of the industrial, agricultural, scientific, technological, and national defense sectors. It facilitated new forms of ownership and privatization, introduced more people into economic decision-making processes, activated the market so products circulated more freely, and opened the country to the outside world. China opened itself up to international bank loans, joint capital ventures, and the different techniques used by other economic powerhouses. The economic liberalization policies that the Chinese government adopted in the 1980s led to tremendous economic growth, encouraging businessmen to explore the Chinese market; the country witnessed a flow of foreign investments and modernization projects unprecedented in history. Thus, in the 1990s, China found its way among the most advanced industrial nations in the modern world and was able to thrive by the 2000s.

Kundun, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner*, similar to other Western Hollywood productions, disregard the positive aspects of China's long and rich history to produce a one-dimensional image of a multifaceted country. Most Hollywood movies seek to personalize devastating periods in China's history, such as the Mongol invasion of Europe, the deterioration of the Qing dynasty, the military attack on Tibet, the Cultural Revolution, and other events. The three 1997 movies follow the trend of negative depictions of history to make a political point and fail to deal with the progress China has made since the 1970s. These movies bring to the mind of the Western audience a Red China under the leadership of Chairmen Mao, considered by the West as one of the most dangerous political tyrants in human history. Another fallacy about history in relation to Chairman Mao is Western popular media's failure to attribute any positive developments to Mao's regime: "Any assessment of Mao's role as head of state must begin with the fact that he took over an impoverished, demoralized, and war-battered nation in 1949. Over the next quarter century he transformed China into one of the major powers of the world, and even if per capita income did not increase greatly, there was a more equitable distribution of income than in the past."[4]

Each movie refers to China as "Red China" and portrays its Communist regime as extremely oppressive and cruel. While there undoubtedly were problems with the Communist regime, as we have noted previously, the construction of a "red" and "evil" China is purely a political fantasy. The term "Red China" is mentioned frequently in the three movies, and Gere's movie is even titled "Red Corner." A good example emphasizing the idea of Red China is found in *Kundun* during the scene when the Dalai Lama is listening to a local Tibetan radio broadcast after he hears from the lamas

about Chairman Mao's declaration of war.

Radio (voice-over): Mao Tse-Tung has called for all-out war. He will settle for nothing less than a Red China. The iron curtain will descend over Asia as it has over Russia and Eastern Europe. It is conceivable that this declaration of war following twenty years of fighting may mark the final moments of a free China.

Most misleading for the audience, the three movies focus on failures within China without putting the events in their real historical context, completely disregarding their circumstances and consequences. The movies completely disregard China at its epoch when it started to emerge as a great power with a remarkable sustained economic growth. Moreover, the three movies reflect the period through applying the propaganda technique, where the audience is exposed to strong negative labels so they associate any negative depiction of the state with the entire country, its people, and its intentions.

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* sloppily depict the Chinese invasion of Tibet. They verbalize the cruel, barbarian process the Chinese troops adopted while destroying the monasteries and killing during the initial occupation. One of the most powerful dialogues in *Kundun* takes place between the Dalai Lama and one of the lamas bringing him news about the situation in Tibet.

Dalai Lama: I have always asked for just plain information.

Lama: The Chinese have bombed the monastery of Lithang; it has been destroyed. They throw rocks from airplanes. Nuns and monks are made to fornicate in the streets. They put guns in the hands of our Khamba children and force child to kill the parent.

Red Corner on the other hand coveys that China is a Communist country with an oppressive regime that controls the life of people, restricts their freedom, and even murders them if they try to protest or question the system. The movie implies that China in the late 1990s is the same as China during the Tiananmen Square crackdown, and the same as China during the Cultural Revolution. The movie opens with a prolonged scene of Tiananmen Square that proceeds with a group of soldiers holding weapons and performing their regular military march in the streets of China only to end with a close-up shot on the surveillance camera that follows the movement of the people. The movie makes an explicit connection between China of 1997 to China of 1989, barely noticing that, while some things have stayed the same, others have changed profoundly.

Moreover, throughout the movie we hear the repetition of terms that stand as symbols of cruelty to the Western audience, such as Chairman Mao and the Cultural Revolution. The director fortifies the verbal violence with flashbacks of screened execution moments showing the Chinese army shooting common people. The concept of China today as an extension of the China of the Cultural Revolution is strengthened further in the movie through the character of General Hong, the father of the girl that Jack is accused of murdering. General Hong was a powerful general during the Cultural Revolution and maintained his position in 1992 while still using the same techniques of intimidation as in the past to get people to submit to his will. That is clearly revealed through the scene where General Hong is

putting pressure on Jack's lawyer to change the plea from "guilty" to "not guilty" so he will be sentenced to death.

General Hong: It is not good that he argues before the court that you do not represent his wishes. I think you must satisfy the American by changing the plea.

Shen Yuelin: General Hong, that is a death sentence. My duty under the law is to defend the accused according to party principles.

General Hong: Yuelin, if I construed my own duties so narrowly, I would have allowed the Red Guards to crush your father during the Cultural Revolution. But I intervened. I valued his friendship, as I value yours. Please do as the American wishes.

This incident contradicts two major facts the movie fails to mention. First, China in 1997 is different from that of the Cultural Revolution due to the tremendous reforms the PRC government applied in different fields since the early 1980s, in addition to natural leadership turnover. Second, the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 after Mao's death, and the reforms instituted were rolled back. Those that opposed the reforms returned to power, and those that promoted the revolution fell from grace. The Cultural Revolution has been treated as a disastrous failure in China ever since. However, it is crucial to mention that some people involved in the Cultural Revolution were "persecuted"; several were sent to jail, yet none had been executed. A new generation of pragmatic reformist leaders rose to power after Mao's death, and this is the China that the *Red Corner* should have been operating in. Sometimes the political situation trumps the factual situation. These movies make political points built on outdated information and myth to make a larger point that agrees with the maker's political sensibilities.

Oversimplification of China's Human Rights and Judicial System

The Communist Party's rise to power in the 1950s produced some dramatic changes that brought on eventual economic and political success but also a great amount of repression and lack of trust in the political culture. Even though in later decades the PRC government loosened its ties on people, human rights violations remain regular and widespread. Heavy restrictions are imposed on forms of expression including freedom of speech, press, Internet, demonstrations, associations, and religion. However, no longer is it realistic to assume that China will crack down on the population in the style of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, but it is still a daily occurrence that prominent artists, politicians, lawyers, and activists are silenced, jailed, or have disappeared. China is still repressive in many ways, but its repression is more localized and individualized.

The Chinese government maintained in the 1990s strong control over the legal system despite opening the political system up a bit. Accused people had a slim chance for a fair trial free from official influence. Furthermore, the Communist Party used legal procedures to detain Chinese and Tibetan people. Arbitrary detentions were conducted against ordinary people who opposed the Communist regime by calling for democracy and human rights. According to the *Human Rights Watch/Asia* report "China Human Rights Fact Sheet: Lack of Judicial Independence and Due Process" released in 1995, the most common forms of administrative detention are

1. “reeducation through labor,” under which police, without trial, can send individuals to labor camps for up to four years; and
2. “shelter and investigation,” under which police can detain people without charge or trial for up to three months, a time limit that is routinely ignored. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has determined that the practice of “reeducation through labor” is “inherently arbitrary” when intended for “political and cultural rehabilitation.” According to PRC government sources, 100,000 people are sent to “reeducation through labor” camps and one million are “sheltered” each year.[5]

The most egregious practice of the legal system was the excessive use of the death penalty. People sentenced to death were denied any right to a fair trial; in many cases they had no access to a lawyer, and if they did have a lawyer they had no more than one or two days to prepare the defense: “In 1993, 77% of all executions worldwide were carried out in China. On a single day, 9 January 1993, 356 death sentences were handed down by Chinese courts; 62 executions took place that day. During that year alone, 2,564 people were sentenced to death. At least 1,419 of them are known to have been executed.”[6] The Chinese legal system has been criticized by Western governments and international organizations as being arbitrary, corrupt, and incapable of protecting basic freedoms.

The maltreatment of prisoners has been subject to strong condemnation by international institutions and interested states. Even though China joined the UN Convention against Torture in 1988, the government did not take the necessary measures to protect the prisoners from abuse and torture. The prisoners remain victims of different kinds of harassment and torture, including rape, beatings, restriction of food, poor sanitation, and the use of electric batons. In several cases, prisoners died due to their treatment.

Since it took over Tibet, the PRC made a major effort to suppress internal opposition. Thousands of Tibetans were held in detention, arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and even executed. Many Tibetans have been detained on only a slight suspicion of conveying anti-Chinese ideas. Moreover, the court system in Tibet falls under the authority of the Ministry of Public Security rather than that of the Ministry of Justice. This means that the security institution controls both the peace and security of the region, as well as the judicial process retarding the distinction between separate government functions. The police lead investigations, detain suspects, and sentence them to prison. Hundreds of Tibetans were detained in the 1980s and 1990s for long periods of time without formal charges and were denied access to legal counsel. Severe harassment and torture were used during detention to force people to confess. The Human Rights Watch claimed, in a 1995 report, that

> human rights abuses in Tibet continued…As of February, over 200 political prisoners were in TAR No. 1 Prison (Drapchi), more than double the number held four years ago…Courts handed down heavy sentences. In late 1993 or early 1994, twelve nuns who allegedly tried to organize a demonstration received sentences of up to seven years. In July, five Tibetans in Pakshoe County in eastern Tibet received twelve- and fifteen-year terms for “counterrevolutionary” offenses. Police arrested at least thirteen monks and nuns in February and March in Lhasa and Kyimshi, some for organizing a peaceful poster and leaflet campaign.[7]

Despite the negative picture of the Communist regime and the strong violation of human rights the PRC government exercised over the people since it took over, it is also essential to consider the positive aspects of the Communist Party and their political system. The party has managed to bring back the country to a period of cohesiveness and has united the people together through the cause of development and modernization. Supporters of the Communist Party claim that China was torn apart for many years by wars and internal conflict and has only recently regained its power and stability due to the efforts of the Communist Party. Despite its well-documented flaws, some of the processes they have put in place have enabled the country to grow at a remarkable speed and avoid the development traps other countries have fallen into.

It is also crucial to mention the great progress the country accomplished in different fields, such as infrastructure, industry, health care, and education, since the early 1980s. China's economic growth dramatically improved the Chinese people's standard of living and expanded the scale of personal freedom (but not political freedom). According to the World Bank data, "By 2001, China had met the foremost of the Millennium Development Goals—to reduce the 1990 incidence of poverty by half—and it had done so 14 years ahead of the 2015 target date for the developing world as a whole… Between 1981 and 2001, the proportion of population living in poverty in China fell from 53 percent to just eight percent…Significantly, half the reduction occurred in the first half of the 1980s."[8]

By the end of the twentieth century, the Chinese enjoyed a greater freedom to own property, initiate businesses, make investments, choose their jobs, and travel. Moreover, the Chinese government initiated a plan to modernize the legal system in operation. It issued hundreds of laws, making a substantial effort to organize the administration of prisons, and sought to increase the power of lawyers and judges. The field of criminal law also witnessed a noticeable improvement with the 1996 revision of the Law of Criminal Procedure. A form of presumption of innocence was introduced along with the termination of the procedure of detention for examination.[9] Unfortunately the process of reeducation remains.

While the intention of reform of criminal procedure was beneficial, overall the government has been facing a dilemma of managing crime that increased dramatically during the stage of reform. To cope with the situation, the Chinese government took severe measures to fight the crime through death penalties: "The crime rate in China has risen dramatically in the era of reform and opening. To cope with waves of crime, severe punishment (including the extensive use of the death penalty) and 'strike hard' campaigns against crimes during which criminals were promptly and severely dealt with have been used."[10]

The Chinese government considers that the Western world's version of human rights differ from that of China. It argues that human rights as a term should consider the economic progress, standard of living, condition of health, and prosperity of the people. The government proclaims that the improvement of quality of living, literacy, and life expectancy of the Chinese people is a good sign of ameliorating the negative human rights situation. Moreover, the PRC government maintains that the human rights situation in China is dramatically improving, yet it remains crucial to exercise control over political speech and information to protect national security and to maintain internal stability. The PRC government considers that internal challenges should be solved within the one-party political system, as any abrupt changes in the regime may have severe consequences at the economic level and may jeopardize the enormous progress the state has achieved in past years. For the Chinese, human rights is a term that means the right to simply live life free from poverty and basic wants,

rather than a life free from political oppression. By this standard, the Chinese have been remarkably successful.

Red Corner deals mainly with the violation of human rights and the corruption of the judicial system. Jack is introduced to Chinese law in his first meeting with the consular officer at the US embassy:

> CONSULAR: You can discuss the investigation only with your lawyer…non-Chinese lawyers aren't allowed to practice here. There are three or four Chinese criminal lawyers who could handle a case of this magnitude, but none of them will touch it. The procuracy will appoint a defense advocate for your case. We'll get you bail. There again I should warn you, it is very rare. It's called guarantee, and it almost never happens.

The movie proceeds with scenes inside the courts showing the indifference and ridiculous behavior of the court members who are no more than puppets controlled by the Communist Party officials. *Red Corner* mirrors with some precision the strong violation of political human rights, the corruption of the judicial system, the excessive use of death penalty, the political control over the court, the mistreatment of prisoners, and the outrageous practice of "verdict first, trial second." However, the movie approaches the human rights deficiency in China through the Western lens. By Western standards the Chinese system is backward and antiquated, but in relation to the challenges the Chinese system faces, its age, and state of development, it can be argued that the Chinese system just needs more time to develop so that it can meet the human rights standards established by the West.

Red Corner oversimplifies a complex problematic issue; it takes the issue of human rights out of its economic, social, and political context in which it has been operating and focuses on its negative aspects, while completely disregarding the positive progress the PRC government accomplished in the judicial system as well as in other aspects, mainly in accelerating economic liberty, fighting poverty, and ameliorating enormously the living standards and general well-being of Chinese in the 1990s. Undoubtedly, the Chinese system has a long way to go until it reaches the standards of political rights in the West, but it should be commended for its rapid progress since the most outrageous offenses of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Tibet: Facts and Fiction

Tibet, located between the two oldest civilizations in the world, China and India, merges myth and spirituality in one place. It is unfeasible for any one movie to catch the essence of its exceptional religious, social, and political structure, its philosophical Buddhist beliefs, and its unique culture. *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* depict one of the bloodiest periods of Tibetan history, combining images of violence with spirituality and the divine nature of the Dalai Lama. These movies merge the political perspective with the spiritual perspective, and mingle fiction with facts. The effectiveness of this combination is to be discussed in the next chapter.

In the past, Tibet enjoyed a very high position among powerful nations. From the seventh to the tenth century, Tibetan emperors managed to unify the country and to expand into Chinese territory. The

Tibetan empire, ruled by successive powerful dynasties, collapsed in the tenth century and was divided into small principalities. In the thirteenth century, the Mongol emperor Genghis Khan integrated Tibet into his empire. Since this time Tibet has never been recognized as a totally independent nation, though its degree of integration with China has varied tremendously through the different stages of history. In 1913, the thirteenth Dalai Lama declared the independence of Tibet, yet the Tibetan government failed to establish formal and direct contact with most countries. In the field of international relations, a country is independent only if it is recognized as a sovereign nation by two or more great powers, and it is clear that Tibet never achieved this level of independence and self-reliance. Tibet lost the privileges of informal independence in 1959 as the Chinese troops penetrated into Lhasa, imposing by force the Communist regime's rules and policies.

Utopia versus the Real World

Tibet, during the rule of the Dalai Lama, was facing some serious political and economic problems. Tibet had to deal with an outbreak of illness, poor birth care, and a political system that only included the upper class and religious groups. The life of the average Tibetan was far below the basic level of poverty. The economy was an ancient agrarian system, while most of the population was illiterate.

Tibet's political, economic, and social structure is deeply connected to the religious system. Tibet's predominant religion is Tibetan Buddhism, which merges Buddhism with Bon—the original religion of Tibet. It is said that "the first significant event in the history of Tibetan Buddhism occurred in 641, when King Songtsen Gampo (c. 609–650) unified Tibet and took two Buddhist wives (Princess Wencheng from China and Princess Bhrikuti Devi from Nepal). Before long, King Gampo made Buddhism the state religion and established a network of 108 Buddhist temples across the region."[11]

The core of Tibetan Buddhism revolves around compassion, personal awakening, reincarnation, and the four noble truths—suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering. Tibetan Buddhist teachings focus on the nature and cause of suffering as well as the way to enlightenment. At the heart of these teachings is dharma: "We can describe Dharma as a way of life, a practice that can be relevant and useful to everyone, to so-called religious people and nonreligious people alike. Why? Because it tells us how to satisfy a longing we have always had, that is, the fundamental desire to experience a lasting state of happiness and to be completely free of suffering and discontent."[12]

Throughout history Buddhism had a strong influence upon the Tibetans, controlling every aspect of their life. It penetrated the daily lives of the Tibetans and developed the social structure connecting them to the land, the power structure, and economic system. Religious beliefs became the essence of Tibetan civilization, culture, education, and politics. Monasteries, temples, and religious centers were widely spread in villages and towns in addition to altars, and pictures of the Dalai Lama were found in every Tibetan Buddhist home: "Tibetan national identity became indistinguishable from its religion. Buddhist folklore and teachings regulated the people's lives, festivals, holidays, work ethics, family chores as well as national issues."[13]

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* approach Tibet from a sympathetic perspective with a political objective by bringing to the mind of the Western audience the tragic images of the massacres committed against the Tibetan people. This image is contrasted with Capra's *Lost Horizon*, which

contains images full of magic and spirituality. Both places exist, but for the movies, the spiritual side of Tibet is dead as long as China remains in power. The myth of Tibet in the 1997 movies is represented within a more rational context, depicting several major historical events even though the representation in *Kundun* is based on the autobiography of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, while *Seven Years in Tibet* is based on Heinrich Harrer's whitewashed memoires and projects the Western viewpoint.

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* depict Tibet, under the rule of the Dalai Lama, as the ideal state that resembles the one imagined by Plato, a state ruled by a great philosopher king and built up on four fundamental qualities: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. The Tibet of Scorsese and Annaud rises above Plato's republic, which is limited to a rulers/auxiliaries relationship to reach the absolute perfection, while the leader, the government, the people (peasants and nobles), the animals, and nature all live together in a wonderful harmony framed within Buddhism and the cycle of life and death. Both movies include the use of the words *love*, *compassion*, *happiness*, *devotion*, and *wisdom* to keep the theme constant.

The two movies attempt to deify Tibet; the historical period they cover is slightly different, and their storylines differ, yet the point is to mythologize the Tibetan perspective and demonize the Chinese. *Seven Years in Tibet* is credited mainly for its ethereal depiction of the Tibetan people and their way of life. The movie promotes Tibetan Buddhist teachings and demonstrates the powerful integration of these teachings into the structure of the Tibetan society. Throughout the movie the audience is exposed to vivid examples of the fusion between Buddhism and the people, as in the scenes dealing with a problem that arises while Harrer is building the movie theater. The Tibetans refuse to proceed with digging as soon as they notice earthworms living there. One of the most impressive moments in the movie is Tibetans saving earthworms and moving them gently and with great caution to a new place so that Harrer can proceed in building the theater without causing any harm to these creatures. The Dalai Lama explains later on to Harrer, "Tibetans believe…all living creatures were their mothers in a past life. So we must show them respect and repay their kindness. And never, never harm anything that lives. You can't ask a devout people to disregard a precious teaching." This moving issue is taken as a lesson; the practicality of the statement is never really discussed. How can one build, sow the earth, and provide for the family if even simply digging into the ground disrespects your ancestors?

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* are unfaithful to history in their representations of Tibet as a place of permanent peace under the rule of the different Dalai Lamas. Their powerful cinematic interpretations of Tibet as a utopia where people live in peace and harmony, according to Buddhist teaching, contradicts with Tibetan history where conflicts and wars occurred at several stages during the different Dalai Lamas' rule. As Donald Lopez notes, "Tibet did not renounce armed conflict when it converted to Buddhism in the eighth century, or in the eleventh century, or under the fifth Dalai Lama…Tibetan armies fought against Ladakh in 1681, against the Dzungar Mongols in 1720, in numerous incursions into Bhutan during the eighteenth century, against invading Nepali forces from 1788 to 1792 and again in 1854, against Dogra forces invading Ladakh from Kashmir in 1842, and against the British in 1904."[14]

The armed conflict events in recent history took the form of clashes among the monks, which were getting stronger every day and which reached their peak in 1947 with bloody confrontations between two regencies—Regent Reting and Regent Taktra. As Thomas Laird, who had several conversations

with the Dalai Lama and published them later in one book, recounts, “Thousands of monk supporters of Reting Rinpoche revolted against the regent, and gun battles erupted around Lhasa. The Taktra regency finally defeated the rebels and Reting Rinpoche was captured, interrogated, and, before any sentence could be passed, murdered in the dungeons of the Potala.”[15] Laird asked the Dalai Lama if he became more cynical after this event, and the Dalai Lama said, “Such fighting (between monks) was common in Kham (in eastern Tibet, south of Amdo). Often during Tibet’s history, monks in monasteries were fighting.”[16]

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* are faithful in their representations of the Tibetan devotion to Buddhism and the Dalai Lama and the great sacrifices they have been offering since the Chinese takeover. The Tibetans have gone to great lengths to protect their culture and beliefs; however, stressing the divine nature of the Tibetan people and their delight in their way of life could be a bit of an exaggeration. Both movies, as many other Hollywood movies about Tibet under the rule of the Dalai Lama, produce a one-dimensional sunny image of a sacred, inaccessible, remote country while also totally disregarding the negative aspects of one of the poorest and most backward regions in the world. The feudal Tibet was beset with problems, including a backward political system, a nonfunctional health care system, and a lack of interest in economic modernization.

The Dalai Lama admitted the deficiency of the system and the need for major reforms. It is true that the Tibetans, in general, seem to be content with the rule of the Dalai Lama, yet some seem to be frustrated by a regime that provides a comfortable life for the nobles and monks while the rest of people live in complete misery. Tibetans, disenchanted with the prior system, at first welcomed the Chinese, and some have even cooperated with them to improve their standard of life. Tibetan and Chinese sources both acknowledge that fact; however, the two sources deviate in their analysis and depiction of the Tibetan cooperation. As John Powers describes,

> Following the suppression of the March 1959 revolt, the Chinese increased their control, and all of our Tibetan sources agree that the vast majority of Tibetans opposed them. The few Tibetans who sided with the Chinese are described as malcontents, beggars, criminals, and other disaffected elements of the society, along with aristocrats who hoped that through collaboration they would be able to maintain their traditional status. Chinese accounts all assert that the PLA was eagerly welcomed by the Tibetan “serfs,” who realized that they had come to liberate them and make them “masters of the land.”[17]

The Dalai Lama as Fiction and Fact in the Movies

Kundun meant to draw the attention of the West toward the spiritual and political leader of Tibet. Scorsese marvelously presents Buddhist concepts, teachings, customs, festivals, folklore, and symbols to gradually involve the audience in the spiritual. Scorsese, through his highly artistic talent and philosophical mind, succeeds in incarnating the wisdom, love, and compassion of Buddhism in the Buddha and transferring all the beauty of the Buddha to the fourteenth Dalai Lama character. From the very beginning of the movie, the Dalai Lama is introduced through the text scrolling the screen as the Buddha of Compassion:

TEXT: The sons of Genghis Khan gave the Dalai Lama his name. It means "Ocean of Wisdom." In a war-torn Asia, Tibetans have practiced non-violence for over a thousand years. The Dalai Lama is their ruler. He is the human manifestation of the Buddha of Compassion. In 1933 the thirteen Dalai Lama died. Four years later, a holy man, disguised as a servant, found himself in a far corner of Tibet. He was searching for the fourteenth Dalai Lama. His search was almost at an end. A Buddha had been reborn.

The movie closes the same way it starts, indicating that the Dalai Lama is Buddha. Throughout the movie, we are given even stronger evidence claiming the Dalai Lama as Buddha, such as the ceremony welcoming scene at the Reting Rinpoche. The regent who found the little boy stands below the throne and introduces Kundun to the crowd as "the Buddha of Compassion, the wish fulfilling jewel, the fourteenth Dalai Lama."

Kundun also introduces the Dalai Lama to the Western audience as the spiritual and political leader of Tibet. The movie portrays the Dalai Lama as a man of peace who rejects war and favors a nonviolent resistance. Throughout the movie we see and hear Kundun denouncing violence, such as in the scene when Kundun is holding a conversation with a Khambas warrior:

KUNDUN: Where are you from?
WARRIOR: Kham, Holiness.
KUNDUN: Warriors.
WARRIOR: We are that, Holiness.
KUNDUN: My army and the Khambas, they fight with almost nothing. No airplanes, no trucks, no weapons, nothing; no one can stop them, even me.
WARRIOR: They fight for you, Holiness; are they wrong?
KUNDUN: Violence is never good. Every result, be it good or bad, it had a cause.

The depiction of the fourteenth Dalai Lama as a man of peace matches perfectly with his image in the West, an image that has been reinforced by the Nobel Peace Prize the Dalai Lama received in 1989. Portrayals of the Dalai Lama as "Buddha of Compassion," "Ocean of Wisdom," and a divine being embracing all the perfection, love, wisdom, harmony, and beauty of Buddhism are admitted to be an exaggeration. The perception could be dangerous, according to K. Togden, a Tibetan monk living in San Francisco and practicing the deity Dorje Shugden that was banned by the Dalai Lama in 1996. In his letter to *Tricycle, The Buddhist Review* magazine, Togden writes, "But now there is something of even greater concern happening as dharma practitioners are blinded by this image of His Holiness the Dalai Lama as god-king, the infallible savior, the last hope. This is a far cry from Buddha's advice to discriminating wisdom as our guiding light. As demonstrated by history, the consequences of such blind faith are disastrous, especially when placed upon someone who is a political leader."[18]

These divine presentations are part of a propaganda technique that has asserted throughout the two movies that the Dalai Lama is Buddha, but this fact has been presented with no real support. It is supposed to be accepted by the audience without question; however, the two movies include

inaccuracies about the divine nature of the Dalai Lama regarding certain facts and events. First, the Dalai Lama is a spiritual leader, but as the political leader of Tibet he has to deal with worldly issues with rational analysis. Second, as the head of Tibetan government, the Dalai Lama shows his disapproval of the use of violence in settling conflicts, yet he never undertook the necessary measures to ending armed fights between the Tibetans and the Chinese; he never gave direct or indirect orders to the Tibetan army and guerillas to stop fighting. Moreover, the Dalai Lama, on many occasions, has declared his respect and concern for the Tibetan army and guerillas. In his autobiographical book *My Land and My People*, the Dalai Lama reveals his admiration for the courage of the Tibetan warriors and claims that he sees no alternative to fight: "In spite of my beliefs, I very much admired their courage and their determination to carry on the grim battle they had started for our freedom, culture and religion. I thanked them for their strength and bravery…By then I could not in honesty advise them to avoid violence. In order to fight they had scarified their homes and all the comforts and benefits of a peaceful life. Now they could see no alternative but to go on fighting, and I had none to offer."[19]

Finally, the Dalai Lama has been accused of establishing some links with the CIA to obtain support for the Tibetan army. True to the films, between 1951 and 1959, the Dalai Lama, due to his very young age, cannot hold responsibility for the CIA involvement in the Tibetan issue. However, the two movies completely disregard the period after 1959 during which the CIA interfered in the Sino-Tibetan conflict through formal contacts with the Dalai Lama's administration. Several reports were published in 1998 in famous American press agencies and publications such as the *Associated Press, The New York Times,* and *Los Angeles Times* concerning the money the Dalai Lama administration received from the CIA, who funded military actions to fight Communism worldwide. The article "Dalai Lama Group Says It Got Money from CIA," published by *The New York Times* World News Briefs on October 2, 1998, states, "The Dalai Lama's administration acknowledged today that it received $1.7 million a year in the 1960's from the Central Intelligence Agency, but denied reports that the Tibetan leader benefited personally from an annual subsidy of $180,000. The money allocated for the resistance movement was spent on training volunteers and paying for guerrilla operations against the Chinese, the Tibetan government-in-exile said in a statement."[20] Ignoring these truths degrades the message of the movies quite a bit. Overall, they would be much more important historical documents of the time if they had included an accurate description of why this Lama was chosen as the Kundun. It should have also been mentioned that the Lama does support nonviolence but has also chosen not to repudiate some of his followers that practice violence. The Dalai Lama's deep connections to the US government and other foreign agencies are not put in their proper context. A more accurate portrayal of the Dalai Lama and his politics might have had much more of a lasting impact since Hollywood of the 1990s and 2000s gravitates toward conflicted and complicated heroes (Batman, Spiderman, and Forest Gump). The Dalai Lama is a more credible character when seen through the perspective of his total experience, warts and all.

The Sino-Tibetan Conflict: Facts and Fiction

Throughout history Tibet managed from time to time to govern itself as an independent nation, yet most of the time, it had various levels of integration with China. The Chinese government took over Tibet in the 1950s and imposed by force the Communist regime's rules and policy. The Tibetan government and the PRC government signed the "Seventeen Points Agreement," which acknowledges

Chinese sovereignty over Tibet; however, the legitimacy of this document became a controversial issue: "Several Tibetan writers ignore the Seventeen-Point Agreement, probably because they consider it invalid or because it presents difficulties for their narratives of Tibetan independence. Those who discuss the agreement characterize the Chinese as duplicitous bullies who forced a helpless Tibetan delegation with no plenipotentiary powers to sign an outrageous document they view as illegal because it was concluded under duress."[21]

The Tibetan uprising started in 1955 as a response to the severe brutality against the Tibetan people, culture, and religion by the aggressors. The revolt, initiated by people who conducted very small, limited operations against the Chinese troops at the beginning, broke out in a larger scale in 1956 with the involvement of the Tibetan army and guerrillas. The revolt reached its peak in 1959 with the support of the CIA and was eventually crushed by the Chinese army in the same year. The Tibetan revolution had devastating consequences on Tibet and its leader; thousands of people were killed, and the Dalai Lama fled to India where he established the Tibetan government-in-exile. The guerrillas managed to carry on some narrow operations against Chinese troops until 1971. In 1965 Tibet was formally declared a region of China, and since then it has been known as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

The Chinese regime has restrained religious freedoms since taking over power in Tibet. Its fight against religion reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution. From 1966 to 1972, thousands of monasteries, temples, and religious centers were destroyed. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of monks and nuns were persecuted. Since 1979, many monasteries and other religious centers have been rebuilt, and people have started enjoying a wider range of freedom to practice their religion. Yet Chinese police agents are spread all over the monasteries to prevent any political activities, and the PRC government has imposed restrictions, such as deciding the number of monks and religion centers and prohibiting the picture of the Dalai Lama, even in homes. The monks and nuns revolted again in peaceful protest to degrading conditions in 2008, and these revolts have been ongoing ever since then. The year 2011 saw the use of self-immolation as a political tactic to protest mistreatment by Chinese authorities. China continues to blame the Dalai Lama for its inability to control the religious branch of society.

The Chinese Government's Viewpoint

China's White Paper, issued by the Information Office of the State Council of the PRC in September 1992,[22] argues that Tibet has been for centuries a provincial region of China. Tibetan monks or lamas headed the internal government; however, major decisions were made by the Chinese emperor. The PRC government recently has claimed the power to confirm the naming of Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas, as was practice since the Qianlong emperor of the Qing dynasty. The Chinese government also claims that Tibet was a part of China for seven hundred years. The successive Chinese governments (Yuan dynasty, Ming dynasty, Qing dynasty, Republic of China, and People's Republic of China) have since exercised sovereignty over Tibet. Even during the brief period of Tibetan independence, China continued to have power over the country.

During the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), the Yuan emperor created the Ministry for the Spread of Governance. Its mission was to deal with the Tibet region, mainly in the realm of military and political affairs. The emperor appointed the members of the ministry, who submitted their reports

directly to him.

The Ming dynasty took power in 1368 and put in new regulations for Tibet. High commanders were set up in Tibet, operating in harmony with the province's military organs and handling civil administration. The central government of the Ming dynasty appointed the chief officials of the military organizations and maintained law and order in Tibet; any official of the Tibetan local government breaking the law was punished. Meanwhile, the third Dalai Lama was at the head of the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism and enjoyed a special status. In 1642 the fifth Dalai Lama, Lozang Gyatso, managed to unite Tibet with the support of the Mongol ruler Gushri Khan, ending a long Tibetan civil war. The Mongol ruler installed the Dalai Lama as a spiritual leader and temporal ruler of Tibet. Lozang Gyatso was the first Lama possessing political power over Tibet.

The Qing dynasty replaced the Ming dynasty in 1644 and reigned until 1911. The Qing dynasty's successive emperors provided the Dalai Lama with great privileges until 1720. At this time they began to officially proclaim the title of the Dalai Lama as well as assign his spiritual and political rank. However, at the end of the eighteenth century the Qing strengthened its control over Tibet and initiated new regulations—the Authorized Regulations for the Better Governing of Tibet—to reform old systems. The main statement of these regulations was that "the Qing government holds the power to confirm the reincarnation of all deceased high Living Buddhas of Tibet including the Dalai Lama and the Bainqen Erdeni…The high commissioners will supervise the handling of Tibetan affairs on behalf of the central government, enjoying the equal standing with the Dalai Lama and the Bainqen Erdeni."[23]

The Qing dynasty collapsed and was replaced by the Republic of China (1910–1949). During this period, China suffered a devastating civil war and invasions. Britain took advantage of the fragile situation of China and communicated to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs an order to deny China's sovereignty over Tibet. The Chinese government refused to submit to the aggressive demand. In 1942, Britain provided a great deal of support to the Tibetan local government, which established the foreign affairs bureau to perform Tibetan independence activities. China condemned this action; however, Britain and the United States welcomed it. The US government declared, "The United States is ready to recognize Tibet as an independent country."

In 1949 the Chinese government finally managed to put an end to the long civil war and created the People's Republic of China. The government grew stronger, succeeded in liberating China from all foreign powers, and started regaining control over the rest of the Mainland, allowing its army to enter Tibet in 1950. The PRC government considers that spreading its authority over Tibet—a Chinese province—is justified and legitimate through legal and historical institutions present for centuries. The PRC government believes it has the right to exert control over its territory and to maintain order, enforce the law, and protect national security using all necessary means.

The Dalai Lama's Viewpoint

The Tibetan government-in-exile, through its official website, replies to China's White Paper with a counterargument claiming that Tibet is a sovereign and independent nation occupied by foreign forces. It states that throughout history, Tibet, even if it occasionally came under the influence of its neighbors, never became an integral part of China. In its early history, Tibet managed to emerge as a strong empire that expanded, under the reign of Trisong Detsen (755–797), into Chinese territory.

This perspective is ignored by China, and many other regimes have used much more flimsy claims to support territorial control.

In the thirteenth century, Mongol rulers set up one of the largest empires in the world. The Mongol Yuan dynasty stretched from the Pacific to Eastern Europe. The Mongol emperors were fascinated by Buddhism and made it the official religion of the state. Thus the Mongol-Tibetan relationship was that of "the patron-priest (*Choyon* in Tibetan) arrangement, which gave internal sovereignty over Tibet to *Phagpa* (the Tibetan religious leader), in return for acting as the Khan's religious preceptor."[24]

From the fifteenth until the seventeenth century, during the Chinese Ming dynasty and after the collapse of the Mongol empire, Tibet was an independent nation. In 1642 the fifth Dalai Lama—Lozang Gyatso—managed, with the support of the Mongol ruler Gushri Khan, to unite Tibet and to become the supreme political and religious leader. Thus the fifth Dalai Lama was recognized by the Tibetans as their *Gongsa Chenpo*, meaning "the supreme sovereign." From the mid-seventeenth century until 1911, during the Qing dynasty, Tibet came under the influence of the Chinese, yet the relations between the successive Dalai Lamas and the Manchu emperors remained based on the *cho-yon* relationship. Manchu forces entered Tibet several times in the eighteenth century, once to help the Tibetans drive out Dzungar Mongols from Tibet, a second time to protect Tibet from a Nepal-based invasion, and twice more to restore order after civil wars. "While the Manchus succeeded in establishing some degree of influence in Tibet during crisis periods in Tibetan politics, their influence declined rapidly during the 19th century. Thus, Tibet fought wars against invaders from Jammu (1841–1842), Nepal (1855–1856), and British India (1903–1904) without Chinese imperial assistance. By the mid-nineteenth century, Manchu imperial involvement in Tibet was only nominal."[25]

In 1912 the Chinese republic overthrew the Qing dynasty. With the deterioration of the Chinese empire, the Tibetans found that the time was appropriate to regain their freedom. They expelled Chinese officials and troops from the region. In 1913, the thirteenth Dalai Lama declared Tibet an independent nation.

In 1950 the Communist Party began to regain power in China; soon the Chinese forces entered Tibet. In 1951 the Tibetan administration representatives were forced to sign the Seventeen Point Agreement, affirming China's sovereignty over Tibet. In the following years, Tibetan protests grew stronger and the Tibetan army and guerillas organized an armed revolution to liberate the country. In 1959 the Chinese troops invaded the Tibetan territories and effortlessly crushed the resistance.

The Tibetan government-in-exile condemns the PRC control over Tibet and views it as illegitimate. It also perceives the policies of the PRC government regarding Tibet as alarming, aiming to dilute Tibet by demolishing its ethnic identity and culture, thus merging it with the rest of the Chinese state. The Tibetan government-in-exile's main goal is to force the Chinese government to acknowledge the right of Tibet in self-determination and political autonomy.

The fact of the matter is that institutions are self-repeating, and perpetuating organizations are tough to control. The Chinese and Mongols formalized the Buddhist establishment in Tibet so it could more effectively rule the population. That this institution has grown on its own to become powerful is hardly surprising. While China does seem to have a legal claim over Tibet, it also must be realistic about the lengths of control in relation to the religious sector. To root out religion, which was the one surviving strong institution in the state, will take time and cannot be achieved simply with the death of the current Dalai Lama, as the Chinese now hope. Complete political and cultural control of Tibet is a

long process, and the concern from Tibet and the West is that this process is being sped up in a way that destroys the heritage of the pious state.

Hollywood's Viewpoint

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* fail to provide an accurate image of the protracted China-versus-Tibet conflict. Scorsese and Annaud, as masters in their field, use cinema to influence the audience and raise sympathy toward Tibet's struggle. That these films are not accurate is not a detriment to their goals, as they seek to incite political awareness rather than provide the audience with a well-rounded education of the issue. The two remarkable filmmakers reveal the political and military circumstances through a spiritual framework and succeed in representing fiction and myths as facts.

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* portray China as absolute evil incarnate. In these movies China aims to kill the Tibetans and destroy their country for no legitimate reason besides greed. The scenes that deal with China's attack on Tibet in 1959 show the Chinese troops as a group of bloodthirsty butchers, savagely killing the innocent Tibetans. The depiction of the horror of the massacres in the two movies is exaggerated; in addition, the political and military context under which these atrocities were committed has been neglected. The fact is that the Chinese troops entered Tibet in 1959 to put an end to the Khampa revolt. Before this, in 1958, the Tibetan resistance, consisting of thousands of men (some sources speak of 5,000 men while others provide higher figures of about 20,000 to 100,000 men), unified under a collective banner: "[The Tibetan forces] fought a series of running battles with the Chinese over the next nine months, inflicting numerous casualties but always being ultimately overpowered by Chinese superiority in numbers, armaments, and mobility."[26] The Tibetan guerilla attacks endured until 1974: "The last bloody fight between the Khampas and the Chinese occurred in 1974, near the Nepalese border. The freedom fighters were severely outnumbered, and the fight was more of a massacre."[27] The two movies, mainly *Kundun*, display no revolution, no war, and no ongoing armed fighting; the movies basically provide only images of thousands of dead Tibetans. The movies show the Chinese troops and Air Force opening the fire at the unarmed Tibetan people, not fighting an ongoing rebellion.

Moreover, to represent the evilness of China in a concrete manner, the two movies display some events or deeds as historical even though they are based on fictions or abstractions. Examples include the closing scene in *Seven Years in Tibet* when the claim by the Tibetan government-in-exile of genocide in Tibet by China is taken as fact. To give more credibility to the scene, Jean-Jacques Annaud uses a documentary approach where the words appear on the middle of screen stating, "One million Tibetans have died as a result of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Six thousands monasteries were destroyed." In fact, the number of Tibetans who have died as a result of Chinese occupation of Tibet is debatable. The Dalai Lama claims that, overall, six thousand monasteries have been closed or destroyed, and 1.2 million Tibetans have been killed by the Chinese since 1950; meanwhile, the Chinese government denies this figure, and nonaligned researchers agree that this figure is exaggerated.

> The claim of the Tibetan government in exile that 1.2 million Tibetans were killed in the course of the imposition of Chinese rule over Tibet is refuted and ridiculed by Chinese officials by citing statistics that there were only 1 million Tibetans in "Tibet" at the time. However, what the

Chinese refer to as "Tibet" is only what they designated as the TAR. There were more Tibetans in other areas outside the TAR than within, the total Tibetan population in the People's Republic of China (PRC) at that time being 2.8 million. Tibetan claims of numbers of deaths may be exaggerated, but most independent estimates agree that some hundreds of thousands died.[28]

Moreover, Tibetologists such as Patrick French, former director of the Free Tibet campaign in London and writer of the book *Tibet: A Personal History of a Lost Land*, consider that the number of 1.2 million deaths in Tibet as doubtful. French writes in an article to *The New York Times*, "The Free Tibet Campaign in London (of which I am a former director) and other groups have long claimed that 1.2 million Tibetans have been killed by the Chinese since they invaded in 1950. However, after scouring the archives in Dharamsala while researching my book on Tibet, I found that there was no evidence to support that figure."[29] This unconfirmed figure of deaths, provided only by the Tibetan refugee group, is well established in the Western conscious after being widely circulated by Western politicians and media: "In the last two decades, a statistical table of unnatural deaths among Tibetans from the 1950s through the 1970s has been widely circulated by Tibetan exiles and their supporters. Its total of 1.2 million is based solely on unconfirmed refugee estimates, but is cited often by Western politicians and media."[30] Annaud succeeds in pushing further the misconception of Chinese genocide of the Tibetans within the Western societies through a fictional context, making its persistence in the Western awareness stronger and everlasting.

Returning to the context of the argument, the movies *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* represent the historical events within the context of a fight between gods and devils. In *Kundun*, as he leaves Lhasa for the Dungkhar monastery, Norbu tells the Dalai Lama, "Tonight Kundun, you'll see the world. The gods will win, the devils will lose." Even though this sentence is a simple proverb that the Tibetans say, for example, when they pass a mountain, the context in which this sentence is said makes it sound as if Tibetans are the gods and the Chinese are the devils. This idea is strengthened even further in Dungkhar monastery as we hear the Dalai Lama reading from Buddhist sacred texts:

DALAI LAMA (VOICE-OVER): Then at the time of midnight, the Bodhisattva saw a clear light. Then, in a single instance, the three states of existence: the past, the present, and the future, purified by the clear light. Then sitting at the tree of enlightenment, he conquered all the devils.

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* rise above the nuanced viewpoints regarding the Sino-Tibetan conflict to provide clear evidence for Tibetan independence. The power of these movies lies in their success in providing a strong illusionary sense of reality, as both are autobiographic/historic genre applying the narration technique and a powerful combination of opposite styles such as realism, magical realism, and expressionism. Like some earlier films in the genre, such as *Lost Horizon*, these films seek not to recreate reality but to propagate a view of reality consistent with the political perspective of the makers.

Moreover, throughout the movies the viewer is exposed visually and verbally to several propaganda techniques, the most important being "simplicity and repetition." The movies act as reverberation for such phrases as "Tibet is not part of China," "Tibet is an independent nation,"

"Tibet independence," "Chinese invasion," and "China invaded." The two movies enhance the idea of Tibet's sovereignty through powerful political statements revealed through dialogue, as in the scene showing the Dalai Lama heading the Kashag meeting:

KASHAG MINISTER: Your Holiness, the Chinese are once again trying to convince the world that Tibet belongs to them.
KUNDUN: Tibet is Tibet.
TAKTRA (REGENT): For a long time, you Holiness, we have agreed to disagree. We knew, and we knew that they knew. Now they are trying to rewrite history.
KUNDUN: How unfortunate. Why don't we ask all the Chinese living here to leave? If there are no Chinese in Tibet, we cannot be a Chinese region.
PHALA: Very good, Kundun. It is time to remind the world we are independent, would you say, Holiness?
KUNDUN: Can India help us? They know we are not part of China.

The two movies mirror the Sino-Tibetan conflict with all its historical and spiritual complexity according to the Dalai Lama's perspective, yet they disregard the Chinese government's viewpoint, claiming that Tibet has been a Chinese province for more than seven hundred years. Moreover, the two movies' statement of Tibetan independence contradicts with the fact that Tibet is, according to international conventions, an autonomous region of China. The United Nations, along with governments all around the world, recognize Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. Even though some Western governments sympathize with the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan perspective, all refuse to acknowledge the Tibetan government-in-exile as the official government of Tibet.

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* provide a very brief and terse perspective about some major events during the period they cover. The two main facts the movies omit, although they significantly altered the course of history, are the influence of the CIA and the internal civil conflict. The two movies completely overlook the interference of the CIA in the conflict. The CIA involvement affected, according to the Chinese, the whole situation in Tibet: "It was no longer a question of revolt by some troublesome Tibetans but an international conspiracy to undermine the victory of the Communist Party in China. Moreover, it presented a direct threat to China's security. This may explain the ferocity of Chinese suppression of the Tibetan revolt."[31]

The two movies close their perspective to the civil conflict in Tibet, which provoked the contentious situation in the first place. This event was problematic to the narrative of Tibetans' satisfaction with the Dalai Lama's rule and their refusal to any kind of Chinese interference in their interior affairs. As a matter of fact, at the time the Dalai Lama was still in power, Regent Reting, who has a great number of Tibetan followers, requested military assistance from the Chinese to take over rule in Tibet. The event, in brief, has developed in this manner. In the mid-1940s, Tibet witnessed a strong internal division between the various monastery groups. The fight for power between Regent Reting and Regent Taktra reached its peak in 1947. Regent Reting's conspiracy to regain regency started in 1944 with the revolt conducted by the Sera monks, which was suppressed by the supporters of Taktra. Reting's attempts to regain power were revitalized in 1947. Reting planned to assassinate Taktra and initiated serious negotiations with Chinese authorities for military support in return for a

treaty surrendering Tibet's sovereignty to China. Taktra was informed of Reting's conspiracy and sent a force to arrest him.[32] A bloody confrontation, a "mini-civil war" as Warren Smith calls it in his book *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations*, took place in the streets of Lhasa. Thousands of Reting supporters revolted against Regent Taktra.

Seven Years in Tibet completely ignores the bloody events of 1947, while *Kundun* reduces them to a few gun shots followed by a very brief explanation that one of the Kashag ministers provides to Kundun:

KASHAG MINISTER: Reting Rinpoche thought he could return as regent; this was no longer possible, Holiness. There was an attempt on Taktra Rinpoche's life…Reting was arrested. The Sera monks fought today on Reting's behalf.

China's Counterpropaganda Campaign

Kundun, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner* were each countered by the PRC government with great hostility. The government launched a strong anti-Dalai Lama propaganda campaign and supported the production of an anti-Western movie—*Red River Valley*. Their fear was that this would start a new trend in Hollywood to demonize the Chinese through narrow and inaccurate cinematic depictions. As we have outlined, the history of Chinese perspectives in Western films has not been kind, to say the least. From the start of film as a visual medium, Asian peoples have been demonized as Fu Manchu-style characters (or General Ming to some) or as hordes of Asian invaders. These Tibetan perspective movies take a more nuanced tactic. They sympathize with the Tibetans and demonize the Chinese simply through storytelling.

China Condemns the Dalai Lama

The PRC government counters Hollywood's argument of portraying the Dalai Lama as a holy person advocating love and peace in the world by claiming him to be a worldly man who was involved in several shameful activities. It declares that the Dalai Lama is a political and military actor rather than a spiritual one.

The PRC government claims that the Dalai Lama has shown tendency for war since the early childhood; as a child he was attracted to war toys, and as he grew up he became fascinated by World War II monuments. Moreover, the Chinese government pretends that the Dalai Lama is a dangerous man, skillful in training guerrillas. That the Dalai Lama's administration admitted that he received around $2 million from the CIA in 1960 to train resistance rebels in Colorado does not help his case. China also accuses the Dalai Lama of receiving donations from terrorist organizations, such as the donation he received from the leader of the Aum Shinrikyo organization that conducted in 1995 a poison gas attack in Tokyo subways, killing 12 people and wounding more than 5,000.

In addition, the PRC government circulated that Heinrich Harrer, the Austrian mountaineer who is the protagonist in *Seven Years in Tibet* and who became the Dalai Lama's closest friend and his trusted teacher, was a sergeant in Hitler's SS and not an innocent climber tricked by the German soldiers to place the Nazi flag on the Himalaya mountains as the movie suggested. The Chinese media

joined the PRC government in its anti-Hollywood campaign, as Orville Schell explains in his book *Virtual Tibet*:

> In the weeks that followed, Party media organs kept up a steady drumbeat of anti-Disney and anti-Hollywood propaganda. *The New China News Agency* joined the fray, quoting someone identified as a Tibetan scholar from the China Tibetology Center as saying that *Seven Years in Tibet* "distorts history" and is "really cheap stuff…that prettifies Nazis while vilifying Tibetans." An editorial in *China's Tibet*, a Party-sponsored magazine, asked, "Should we regard this follower of those who committed towering crimes against humanity as a hero of human rights? Should Hollywood sing songs in praise of Nazis?" And the *China Daily* warned Hollywood that it would "never be forgiven" for all the movies it was making on Tibet that "hurt our nation's feelings."[33]

China Strikes Back with Its Own Movie

Chinese artists, with support and encouragement from the government, replied to Hollywood's anti-China campaign with a movie showing the relation between China and Tibet from their own perspective. If Tibet was going to play the movie propaganda game, China could too. *Red River Valley*, as much as it is a celebration of the return of Hong Kong to China, is an attack against Western political interference in China. The movie is about the British invasion of Tibet and how the Hans and the Tibetans united together to protect their homeland: "Of the recent films made about the invasion of Tibet, *Red River Valley* is unique in that it does not portray the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959. Rather, it portrays the British invasion in 1904. The movie is based on a memoir written by a British commander, and is directed by Feng Xiaoning, a director from mainland China. According to a Chinese newspaper, the film was produced to counter attacks made on China by recent Hollywood films such as *Seven Years in Tibet*, *Kundun*, and *Red Corner*."[34]

Shot entirely in Tibet, *Red River Valley* was Shanghai Film Studio's big budget production. The movie tells the story of a Chinese girl (Snow Dawa), saved by her brother from being sacrificed in a religious ceremony. The girl ends up in a raging river and again is rescued by an old Tibetan woman. The Han girl is brought to Tibet, where she becomes a member of the community. The lifestyle is primitive, yet the young girl adapts easily. Dawa falls in love with a local herdsman (Shao Bing). Meanwhile, a Scottish explorer (Ronson) and his British interpreter (Jones) arrive in Tibet and are saved from execution by the herdsman. The explorer decides after a while to return home while the interpreter, fascinated by the place, people, and lifestyle, chooses to remain in Tibet. During his stay in Tibet, the British man falls in love with Snow Dawa, the beautiful daughter of the headman, but she is in love with Shao Bing, who returns her love. The Scottish explorer returns four years later with a British army to colonize this far-away territory. The Han Chinese and the Tibetans fight together against the British invaders.

The movie focuses on four major political points. First, Tibet is a Chinese province, and the Tibetan chief follows the rules and commands set by the emperor of China. Second, the Tibetans are content with their situation and live in harmony with the rest of China. Third, the Tibetan system is feudal, where monks and nobles possess the bulk of production while holding control over the people and even interfering in the smallest detail of their lives. Finally, Great Britain is a dangerous and

deceitful enemy that aims to destroy Tibet—its people and culture—and also weaken China.

The political messages are powerfully revealed in the second part of the movie with horrifying, prolonged war scenes where the viewer is exposed to a barbaric massacre committed by the British troops against the pure and peaceful Tibetans. The movie contains strongly provocative visual scenes; the most impressive are the shooting of the Tibetan monks wearing long red robes while trying to flee from Tibet and the destruction of the most sacred place for the Tibetans, the Potala Palace. The bloody scenes are perfectly verbalized through dialogue between the Scottish explorer and the British senior officer, such as when the daughter of the Tibetan chief is captured by the British troops who persist in shelling the unarmed people.

JONES: What damned civilization is this? What kind of soldiers are these? They are acting like beasts and mad dogs.

RONSON: Watch your language; you are speaking to a senior officer.

JONES: Senior butcher is more like it.

RONSON: Young man this is war; do we like watching this country dying like that?

JONES: Why we're here? To kill and be killed to turn this place into a slaughter house? This is not war.

RONSON: We are here to do our duty, and right now we fight for kingdom and country. Every single soldier here has someone—a mother, a wife, a child, someone—waiting for them to come home.

Red River Valley was a hit in the Chinese market at the time it was released; however, it failed to find distributors abroad. The Chinese side of the story of Tibet didn't manage to cross to the other side of the world. Even though it won many national awards, the movie is virtually unknown anywhere but China. The fact that this movie, and others made in China, like *Flowers of War*, has failed to gain the attention of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences is seen as evidence of the significant barriers preventing the Chinese culture to penetrate the West and the world through movies and other cultural products. We have no way of knowing how deep the bias goes. Some films like *Flowers of War* are simply poorly done propaganda films. Others in the future may have more merit and succeed in making the Oscar lists.

This incident demonstrates the power of the Western perspective. While the Western movies discussed here were no major blockbusters in the vein of Titanic or Star Wars, they were widely seen, known, and discussed. These movies, along with Western celebrities' activities, artistic works, and statements, constructed a perspective that influenced millions, if not hundreds of millions, around the world to learn more about Tibet and Buddhism. Some converted to Buddhism and dedicated their lives to helping Tibet. Others only view the Tibet movement as a foundational perspective that demonizes the Chinese. China's attempt to the do the same failed. No matter what power China gains in the international community, it will most likely fail to reach the level of soft power the West controls through Hollywood.

Chapter 7
The Hollywood Effect and Tibet

A Study of Media Effectiveness and the Current Free Tibet Movement

Hollywood joined the Free Tibet campaign to draw international awareness to the Tibet issue and to motivate the United States and other Western governments to put political and economic pressure on China to alter its policy toward Tibet. The Hollywood effect on the Sino-Tibetan conflict could be evaluated by examining the power of the media to alter public policy. According to Bernard Cohen, the concept of proactive media and agenda setting is key to the process. As Cohen states, "The American media play an 'agenda-setting' role, imposing on foreign-policy officials a set of priorities and perspectives that are frequently different from the priorities and perspectives that would otherwise inform their judgment. Thus the media, in their ordinary exercise of their craft, become important public actors on the foreign-policy stage."[1]

Referring to the concept of agenda setting and communication theories advocating the media's powerful effect on society, we may consider Hollywood productions as a mass communications medium that possess the power to alter policy by motivating the American public and inducing them to take a position on a policy they would otherwise ignore. Moreover, as the media power is mostly symbolic and persuasive, Hollywood is considered one of the most potent media industries, but the question remains in its ability to make changes in public policy discourse. The important task is to examine the agenda that the organization and media personality advocate and whether or not it was effective in bringing this issue to the forefront of discussion. The effectiveness of Hollywood is problematic because, although Hollywood was effective in bringing the Tibet issue to the public's conscience, it failed to make any great changes in policy outcomes. Hollywood set a Tibet agenda but failed to translate this discourse into proactive and lasting policy changes.

Hollywood Stimulus Effect

The Hollywood effect on the Tibet issue can be examined through agenda-setting theory as it interacts with the issue-based approach (IBA). The basic premise is that mass media can determine the focus of the viewer by choosing what stories and reports to feature and how much importance and space to

give them.[2] The axis of agenda-setting theory and the issue-based approach is the salience of an issue: "This salience on the media agenda tells the viewers, readers, and listeners 'what issues to think about.' Research on the agenda-setting process suggests that the relative salience of an issue on the media agenda determines how the public agenda is formed, which in turn influences issues policymakers consider. Control of the choices available for action is a manifestation of power. Policymakers only act on those issues that reach the top of the policy agenda."[3] If agenda setting works in practice, Hollywood, or any other type of actor, would be able to transfer issues that matter to the general public by using various communication strategies. In this case, we see the power of film, music, and television as orchestrated by interested Western media personalities to move Tibet into the agenda space normally occupied by other critical issues. In short, the advance of the Tibetan perspective by Hollywood was remarkable in that the American public and others became deeply interested in Tibet when the conflict had no direct relation to the daily life of an American.

Hollywood highlighted the Tibet conflict in the 1990s with the intention to transfer this issue from its personal agenda to the public's agenda and then to the agenda of President Clinton's administration. Hollywood's political message was set and sent through its celebrities' activities and high-production movies. The Western film industry and media dramatically promoted Tibet's struggle for freedom and created a public awareness centered on the issue. For a short period, Hollywood was able to convert the public and policy agenda to focus on the problem of Tibet. While this effect was brief and virtually nonexistent by the 2000s, the success of a media group to set the agenda at the time was remarkable, seeing as Tibet was so far from the normal item of public interest. Another communication theory through which we may observe the issue of Hollywood and Tibet is cognitive dissonance theory. Hollywood's influence on the American public opinion can be understood through cognitive dissonance theory, which holds that dissonance exists when there is a disconnect between what a person does and what he knows, believes, and considers appropriate.[4]

The American public was caught in the 1990s in a state of dissonance as a new situation occurred, urging them to think and act in a manner contradictory to their values and norms. Leon Festinger explains that dissonance arises, and persons sometimes find themselves doing things that do not fit with other opinions they hold; this is due to several reasons, though the following are the most important: "1. New events may happen or new information may become known to a person, creating at least a momentary dissonance with existing knowledge, opinion, or cognition concerning behaviors…2. Even in the absence of new, unforeseen events or information, the existence of dissonance is undoubtedly an everyday condition. Very few things are all black or all white; very few situations are clear-cut enough so that opinions or behaviors are not to some extent a mixture of contradictions."[5]

The Americans have their norms, values, and community system built upon two fundamental principles: freedom and democracy. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."[6] This foundational concept orientates all public life in the United States.

Americans have long considered the Communist regime's prohibiting the freedom of religion, speech, and press while exerting a high level of cruelty, oppression, and violation of human rights as backward and outdated for a modern state. Some even go so far as to label these regimes evil, or

lacking a goodness central to any concept of consent and governance. China emerged in the late 1990s as American's most powerful potential enemy and a growing threat, mainly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Tiananmen Square massacres, and its dramatic economic growth. The fear directed toward China motivated action and provided for the context of the Tibet situation to become part of the public discourse.

The paradox was that China in the 1990s was perceived as the most powerful competitor and, at the same time, the United States' most powerful ally at the economic level. The economic growth of China in the 1990s opened new dimensions to Sino-American relations; the West had to approach China from the economic perspective considering their new economic might. Western views of China started to shift from perceptions of a Communist country with an oppressive regime to a gold mine with a huge economic market yet untapped: "From 1993 to 2002, direct investment in China by US companies increased by a factor of ten, making the United States the second largest foreign investor in China. (Hong Kong, though nominally a part of China but with a separate economic and political structure, is the largest foreign investor.)"[7] Therefore, a positive relationship with China became crucial for the United States to maintain its own hegemonic position.

The great economic power had to learn to deal with the rising economic power and potential marketplace that China offers. The new situation and knowledge created a state of discomfort among the Americans since this new relationship did not fit with the old mold of thinking. China at various times was demonized by the American public; many boycotted China and "buy American" movements were created. In the end, the United States had to learn to live with this new relationship, as China's own investment into the United States increased to such a large extent that a great portion of America's debt was owned by China.

Hollywood had to overcome the obstacle of the significance of the Chinese market to make its political message persevere. By trying to reduce the dissonance among the American audience, Hollywood was able, for a time, to make some consider China an evil human rights disaster but also an important customer. According to Festinger, "It is possible to reduce the total magnitude of dissonance by adding new cognitive elements."[8] Hollywood celebrities' activities and movies, attracting millions of Americans, held the dominant cognitive elements concerning China, thus having the power to reduce effectively the dissonance among the American audience while reinforcing in their mind the negative images of China. Hollywood movies projected destructive images of the Chinese regime, depicting the massacres committed against the Tibetan people and the strong violations of human rights that coincide with the old stereotypes of the American public. The importance of these movies remains in their ability to provide new knowledge about China's oppressive system while depicting, overstating, or even creating certain facts, events, and situations.

Moreover, *Red Corner* details the worst-case negative situation economic actors can encounter in China. Something bad happens and the business and investor have no protection from the justice system. The movie carefully depicts the negative aspects of this situation and uses the "assertion"[9] propaganda technique to provide what is fiction as fact while confirming that the practices of the Communist regime may jeopardize the American business investments in China and, more catastrophically, may threaten the American investor's life. A more recent take on the issue might point out that Chinese business leaders can be executed for fraud, negligence, and general incompetence. Execution for corruption in the business sector is a possibility most do not consider, but it is a reality in China.

Hollywood's double role as a dream factory and a media center makes it the best agenda setter possible around the issue of Tibet. While trying to fulfill its entertainment goal, Hollywood managed to achieve a high success in delivering its political message at the same time. Hollywood assisted the American people in maintaining a negative view of China while the American economic sectors tried to push the positive aspects of the relationship with China. With some time it has become clear the negative view has won out. China continues to be a "threat," as the American people perceive—its continued poor human rights record, rejection of environmental legislation, and failure to open its markets to most American businesses only continues this perception.

It is important to note that the wave of anti-China/pro-Tibet sentiment initiated in the 1980s developed dramatically in the 1990s with the strong involvement of Hollywood celebrities to reach its peak with tree Hollywood movies released in 1997. A poll conducted by Time/CNN between 1996 and 1999 showed American discontent with the US government's open policy toward China, favoring human rights over economic interests: "A majority [of Americans] said it wanted to 'take a strong stand on human rights even if this might jeopardize our diplomatic and trade relations with China' rather than to 'establish strong diplomatic and trade relations with China, even if this requires overlooking some of China's human rights violations' (57 percent to 28 percent in May 1999)."[10]

Hollywood, as a driving force of Western media and entertainment sector, was successful in setting the public agenda for a time. Most Americans were willing to overlook economic necessity if it meant supporting the human rights condition in China and Tibet. These types of perspectives challenge the dominant view of international relations theory that suggests the national interest is the way states make foreign policy. In fact, powerful operators can set the agenda along whatever perceptual lines they insist.

Hollywood and Its Impact on US Foreign Policy

Hollywood and the movie industry have at their disposal a powerful visual medium capable of influencing the foreign policy agenda. In collaboration with the Western media, Hollywood succeeded in stimulating the West's imagination regarding Tibet's struggle for freedom. It succeeded in motivating the public around this issue. We also can notice that the American government made Tibet an issue in the 1990s. Tibet became one of its priorities and the US Senate strongly condemned the PRC government for its constant violation of human rights, mainly on the issue of Tibet. The US State Department's Human Rights Report, released on February 26, 1999, describes the harassment that the Chinese government used against the Tibetans in 1998:

> The Chinese Government strictly controls access to and information about Tibet. Thus, it is difficult to determine accurately the scope of human rights abuses. However, according to credible reports, Chinese government authorities continued to commit serious human rights abuses in Tibet, including instances of torture, arbitrary arrest, detention without public trial, and lengthy detention of Tibetan nationalists for peacefully expressing their political views. Tight controls on religion and on other fundamental freedoms continued, and intensified during the year…Legal safeguards for ethnic Tibetans detained or imprisoned are the same as those in the rest of China and are inadequate in design and implementation…TIN reports indicated that the rate at which

> Tibetan political prisoners are dying under detention or as a demonstrable result of detention shortly after release is increasing.[11]

However, Hollywood's impact on US foreign policy was very limited and short lived. Hollywood celebrities and production companies failed to achieve a lasting agenda they built up. The Dalai Lama's strategy to push President Clinton to put pressure on China to adopt a more positive policy regarding the human rights and Tibet issues ultimately failed.

In 1997, the Chinese president visited the United States, his first visit in 12 years and a turning point in relations between the United States and China. The China-United States joint statement that was issued following talks between President Jiang Zemin and President Bill Clinton reinforced greatly the relations between the two countries. The joint statement affirms that great efforts should be made to achieve a productive strategic partnership between China and the United States by increasing cooperation to meet international challenges and promote peace and development worldwide. The US government adopted an open-door policy toward China in the 1990s; China officially was granted, due to the support of the American government, a permanent MFN status in 2000 and became a member of the WTO on December 11, 2001. In the 2000s, the main issues of concern were the trade import/export imbalance, the value of Chinese currency, and the status of North Korea. Tibet fell out of consideration.

Hollywood and the US government regard the Sino-Tibetan conflict as an important issue, but just how important the issue is differs according to each actor. For Hollywood, Tibet is a significant issue but is no longer a priority since the early beginning of the twenty-first century. For the US government and the foreign policy community, Tibet is a serious issue but falls low on the list of important topics. More recently, the government has been more concerned with internal Chinese detentions, the legal community, and the rate of executions rather than Tibet. While Hollywood aims to support Tibet's struggle for freedom, the US government aims to use Tibetan human rights concerns as a powerful tool to counter any threats the Chinese make. During the Clinton and Bush administrations, both presidents met several times with the Dalai Lama and encouraged Sino-Tibetan negotiations. Both presidents also urged the Chinese president to hold a meeting with the Dalai Lama and expressed their discontent in the way the Chinese government was handling Tibet affairs, mainly in the realms of religion, culture, and freedom of expression. Since 1990, the US government has shown a great interest in Tibet's unique culture and religious heritage. It has insisted on the Chinese government to protect these aspects of life, but how salient these considerations are is a matter of debate.

The US government's supportive attitude toward Tibet is, on the one hand, prompted by the American public's support of the Tibet cause and, on the other hand, by the desire to hold Tibet over the Chinese as an issue of contention to gain agreements on other issues. The US government never puts any real pressure on China to defend Tibet's autonomy for fear of jeopardizing the Sino-American relationship. The United States does not even support Tibetan independence. China has become indispensable for the United States as an economic market; the US government continues to favor its economic interests over Tibet. The US Census Bureau provides the data for US-China trade relations, showing that "since 2007 China has become the United States' principal source of imports accounting for 19% of total imports in 2009 outpacing Canada and Mexico that provided 14% and 11% of total imports respectively. China is also the third largest export market for the US with 6.6%

of total exports in 2009."[12]

A great majority of Americans motivated by Hollywood celebrities' protests, activities, and movies have rejected the open-door policy with China and called for taking extreme measures to force the Chinese regime to respect the Tibetan people's right to self-determination. However, the pressures Western people have exerted upon their governments failed to generate permanent changes in these governments' policy platforms regarding China. Any impact of Hollywood on the public policy agenda was short lived, but the impact on millions of people will be long lasting. Continued disrespect for human rights and self-determination in Tibet is a brewing tempest that only requires another powerful actor or director to reignite the entire process once again.

Free Tibet Movement: Past, Present, and Future

The Impact of Tibetan Activism

While China reacted strongly to the movies produced in 1997, an open question is just how much impact did the Free Tibet movement[13], highly supported by Hollywood, have on the American and Western publics? Certainly there was a reaction by the diplomatic establishment and the Clinton administration, but how much did the various Free Tibet organizations penetrate society-at-large? While China certainly paid attention to the movement and let it affect diplomacy and economic relations, did awareness of the Tibet issue increase with the movement? Was there a lasting impact due to the movement's efforts?

All these questions have not been formally answered in the literature and remain open to debate. Overall we find little evidence of a continuing Free Tibet movement. While public support for the issue remains high, evidence of actual activists and an engaged public is lacking, suggesting that the events of 1997 failed to initiate a serious and effective public engagement. Nonetheless, public awareness of the issue remains high, and the public in the West overwhelmingly supports the Free Tibet movement.

The Beginnings

The start of the Free Tibet movement can generally be located in 1987 with the Lhasa proindependence protests, which were quickly crushed by Chinese forces. At first, the movement was generally centered on human rights concerns rather than an explicit connection to Tibet. It took time for the connection between activism and Tibetan culture to develop. This arrangement demonstrates the power of issues rather than events to dominant politics and culture. An issue has to take hold with the media, elites, and public before events can even enter the public space. The issue is what defines the event.

From initial protests the movement coalesced into a full-blown media movement centered on the activities in Hollywood, the music industry and Free Tibet concerts, and Internet sources. There are a few notable organizations still in operation, including the World Tibet Network News, Tibet Information Network, and the Tibet News Digest. Thorough these networks, Tibetan activists were able to communicate to their supporters and to communicate information to the worldwide press to gain attention for their cause.[14]

Just how widespread was the cause in general? It's difficult to know overall general engagement of the Tibet issue in terms of raw numbers or percentages. A Google.com NGram can give us some sense of the level of awareness of the issue through time. Google NGrams quantify the usage of certain words in the English language as used by books and other media sources. Figure 7.1 displays the relationship between mentions of "Tibet" and the "Dalai Lama." While attention paid to the Dalai Lama seems to remain low and steady through the years, notice of Tibet seems to have increased in the early 1990s, spiking a bit in 1996 and 1997. Tibet once again spikes in 2003 and 2005 and seems to gather more attention as the years go by. We can suggest that awareness of Tibet overall has dramatically increased although the causes of this awareness can be located in either the activists supporting the region or the news media's coverage of protests and conflict in the region.

The Tibet Freedom Industry

The Free Tibet movement seems to have become clichéd and an industry in itself. The group sustains themselves by continuing the grand narrative of "Tibet equals goodness" and "China equals evil." Crafts, festivals, and documentaries continue to be produced with no measureable impact. The group overall seems to continue to be engaged due to the spiritual hole Tibet has filled in those seeking enlightenment; others seem to work for profit and have created a "freedom industry" that sustains itself off the misery in the region. As long as Tibet remains repressed, they have a cause to fight for even if no one else seems to be interested in this fight.

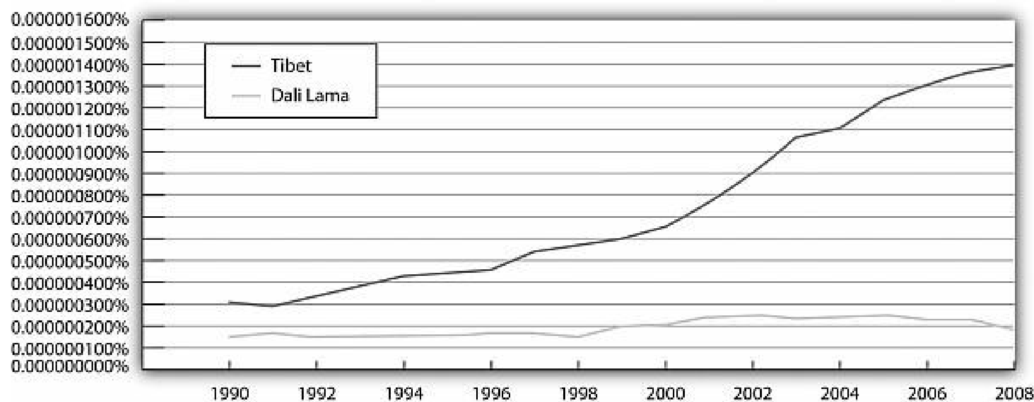


Figure 7.1 "Tibet" and "Dalai Lama" as used in Google archived books through time[15]

Canada has a thriving Free Tibet movement, but the issue has gained little recent traction in the United States. The movement seems to sustain itself on calendars and trinkets. As Peter Bishop notes, "The problem is exacerbated due to the policy, by most Tibetan exile groups and their western supporters, of engaging in an idealized cultural politics."[16] By idealizing and mythologizing Tibet, the reality of the situation actually has a negative impact on the movement. It is difficult to travel to the region with Chinese resistance. Those that do travel are discouraged by what they see. While the news media are able to cover recent events, there is little ability by the press to get video footage of various battles and running protests throughout Lhasa.

It seems that critics of the movement had a strong impact. Many woke up to the idea that the movement was objectifying Tibet positively. Dreams of a mythical Shangri-La were dashed in the face of the reality; Tibet is a territory controlled tightly by China, a global superpower whose ability to project power is equal to that of Russia and the European Union. The heroes of the movement are few beyond the Dalai Lama. The hero that *Seven Years in Tibet* was based on, Heinrich Harrer, turned out to have ties to the Nazi party, dismaying activists and the casual observer alike. So what evidence is there of support for the Tibet movement?

Public Opinion Polling Data

Public opinion polling data can give us some sense of global awareness of the Tibet issue and what various regions and activists feel about the situation. Overall, support for Tibet seems to be high. In the 2010 Global Values survey of US-Chinese issues, 63 percent of respondents said they were very concerned about China's treatment of Tibet, and 31 percent indicated they were unconcerned.[17] A CNN 2010 poll asked respondents if Tibet should be independent or remain part of China, and 73 percent of respondents answered that Tibet should be free.[18] Overall, support in the United States is positive but not uniformly so. It is unclear how much supporters really know about the movement and conditions in Tibet beyond the statements of Hollywood celebrities and Western fiction and documentary movies, mainly the three remarkable Hollywood movies that came out in 1997.

In 2010, FreeTibet.org commissioned a statistically representative poll of the British population on the eve of a Chinese diplomatic mission to the United Kingdom.[19] The poll revealed that 36 percent of the British public thought that protecting human rights in Tibet was more important than maintaining good trade relations with China. Another 38 percent thought trade and human rights were equally important issues. Only 13 percent surveyed believed that trade was more important than human rights. When asked about the political status of Tibet, only 3 percent of the population believed that Tibet should be ruled by China. A great majority (58 percent) believed Tibet should be independent, and 18 percent believed it should be an autonomous region. The poll demonstrates the depths of positive feelings by the British toward Tibet.

A February 2010 meeting between President Obama and the Dalai Lama started a furious round of debates between China and the United States. China opposed the visit and suggested that the United States make a clear statement that Tibet is a region of China. When polled, 64 percent of the American public agreed the meeting should go ahead, and only 16 percent disagreed.[20] These numbers closely match the Global Values survey, suggesting there is a consistent public view of the issue in the United States.

A 2008 poll conducted before the recent round of violence in Tibet shows a more measured global view of Tibet and its relationship with China. The poll was run by WorldPublicOpinion.org in the countries of France, the United Kingdom, the United States, India, Indonesia, and South Korea and demonstrates the great majority are critical of China's handling of the Tibet issue.[21] In the United States, 74 percent of respondents are critical of China. A similar positive result holds in South Korea (84 percent), France (75 percent), and to lesser extent the United Kingdom (63 percent). Indonesia is more measured with 54 percent critical of China. The interesting finding comes in relation to India, the country closest to Tibet and the one that harbors the Dalai Lama. Only 37 percent are critical of China, and 33 percent side with China in the dispute. This finding is telling since India has a deeper

engagement with Tibet than the West and is no friend of China, having fought many border wars and sustaining a long rivalry with the state.

While public opinion seems to be strongly in favor of Tibet in general and independence in particular, what remains to be uncovered is what the impact is on the key players in the debate in China. While they will not be swayed by public opinion polls or general displays of activism, they must be aware of public sentiment. The only thing that would convince the Chinese to take a more measured stance against Tibet would be greater power by ethnic Tibetans in their attacks against Han Chinese in the region, concerted engagement by the West including the United States and United Kingdom, or a push by the United Nations to grant cultural autonomy for Tibet. The first option is solely up to the Tibetans working within Tibet, but activism, cultural power, and entertainment initiatives could sway the other two actors to become involved again.

Whatever Happened to the Free Tibet Movement?

We are left with the simple question: if public support for Tibet remains strong, where did the Free Tibet movement go? Why are there no more concerts, movies, and large public events centered on the question? Was the movement a fad or a reflection of the time and place where the events were centered?

Quite simply, the activists became distracted. World events passed them by. At first the cause was important and global, but excitement started to ebb in the face of fierce Chinese resistance. This is what happens when activism meets a growing national power. China has no interest in compromise since the issue is connected to their status as a great power and the traditional concept of the national interest. The Chinese see Tibet as part of their territory and thus have no interest in giving it up or bowing down to international pressure over the issue.

Most likely the key reason the Free Tibet movement has floundered is because of the dynamics of global politics. In the 1990s, China was the big threat, the country to fear. By the 2000s China had become integrated into the world economy and continues to act benevolently in foreign policy, not making waves. While fears of China still remain, the danger seems to be ebbing in academic discourse, and public discourse should eventually catch on. More important, 9/11 happened and distracted the world away from questions regarding China to focus on the Middle East. Terrorism and the fear of terrorism became the global priority after 2001, and China remains low on the list of threats now. After Iraq came the intervention into Afghanistan by NATO, further fixing the world's attention away from the Far East.

As we move into 2012, the key threats seem to be the global economic situation and Iran. The global depression of 2008 reminded some countries that economic markets are important, and trade can provide a pathway toward global growth. No longer can extreme trade disparities exist between China and the world. The only way to fix this problem is to work with China in opening their markets. This can't be done without explicit government support from the Chinese.

In 2012, Iran is the main talking point as they move toward the development of a nuclear weapon, and the fear is that Israel will intervene to stop this process. On top of this issue, the Arab spring of 2011 continues with civil war in Syria. All these issues mean that China and Tibet are no longer the priorities. The salience of these issues is low compared to global terrorism, economic markets, nuclear weapons proliferation, and democratic transitions. The issue-based approach contends that

the salience of the issue itself will determine the ferocity at which the world will confront the problem. In this case we see great awareness for the problem in Tibet but little salience when compared to other global problems.

The Future of the Free Tibet Movement

The Beijing Olympics of 2008 were an important bellwether for the future. The Olympics were successfully put on with no major international disasters or crises. China was able to showcase both its power and its cultural commitment to global prosperity. While some groups protested on behalf of Tibet, and even tried to push for a Free Tibet team to enter the Olympics, they ultimately were unsuccessful.

The Olympics are not meant to be politicized, but the reality is that the PRC government was successful in painting a positive picture of the state as a growing source of pride and cultural engagement. China successfully politicized the games, effectively removing Tibet from the global agenda. The hopes of the Free Tibet movement were broken apart against the rocks of the 2008 Olympic Games.

The primary source of the continued Free Tibet movement seems to be located in Canada, where they have an active network of activists and still hold festivals. As Andrew Davies quotes, “One activist told me ‘It’s amazing. Canada is really kicking off about this—there’s been loads of coverage over there.’”[22] The United States is much different.

An analysis of what has now become known as Groupon’s Tibet incident is particularly enlightening. During the 2011 Super Bowl for American football, one of the most-watched sporting events in the world and purveyor of high ad rates in the United States, the Groupon Corporation ran an ad suggesting Tibet was in trouble and that its culture was devastated. The actor then goes on to note, “But they still whip up an amazing fish curry. And since 200 of us bought a groupon.com, we are now getting 30 dollars worth of food for 15 dollars at Himalaya [restaurant] in Chicago.” While the ad was meant to be funny, outrage was immediate. Many noted the crassness of the commercial. Groupon countered that they were donating to the cause and that the ad was meant to be funny. What is illustrative is that controversy died off almost immediately. There was no reviving the Free Tibet movement in light of the incident, even in the face of increased violence in Tibet. Many noted the incident was crass, but there were no new waves of donations, and Groupon was hardly affected.

Actual numbers of activists remain low. No longer can one expect to see Richard Gere, the Beastie Boys, and Brad Pitt waxing eloquently about the Tibetan cause. The movement has pretty much died off in the West except for Canada. As Davies notes in an ethnographic study of the Free Tibet movement, “On many occasions, people have spoken about how small the movement is, and here people told me about how they’d arrived for previous protests expecting hundreds of people, but had in fact been the only people to attend. Thus, while it can claim to be a global network of organizations, the actual numbers in the Tibet Movement remain relatively small, and it is through the interaction of these small numbers of people and their attempts to keep the campaign a prominent issue that anything happens at all.”[23]

Davies’s assessment of the movement is particularly devastating. The fact of the matter is that there is really no active Free Tibet movement despite an increase in violence in Tibet since 2008. Tianjun Fu and Hsinchun Chen’s analysis of cyber activism in Tibet is also enlightening.[24] They note a global

network of websites operating within the movement centered on the hub of Tibet.org and also include news sources like Tibet.net and Xizang-zhiye.org. The sad part of the analysis comes from an examination of participation in discussion groups. There was a great decline in activity from 1999 to 2002 at the forum FreeTibetAndYou. Active users in a site such as Tibet.tibetsearch.com and groups.yahoo.com/group/FreeTibetAndYou only include a total of 484 active users between 1999 and 2007. In light of these facts it is tough to argue that the Free Tibet movement is thriving and will endure into the future.

The Dilemma of Idealizing Tibet and Internationalizing Its Struggle

As a part of the media sector, Hollywood's impact is evaluated according to the objective presented in its movies. Hollywood's power to stimulate the public imagination renders its effectiveness deeper and stronger, going beyond simply creating awareness of issues and instead creating a sustained perspective that supports Tibet, the Dalai Lama, and Buddhism.

Hollywood's impact on the Sino-Tibetan conflict goes beyond the framework of communication theories; its impact should also be evaluated in terms of two factors: idealization and internationalization. By seeking public and governmental support for Tibet by idealizing Tibet and its leader, Hollywood fell in the trap of reducing Tibet to a magical place that exists only in our mind while turning its conflict with China to a Manichean struggle for a sort of apocalyptic battle between God and devil, between the powers of good and the powers of evil, that is taking place within a philosophical supernatural context. This realm of analysis is not consistent with reality and has no place in the policy process.

The way the Dalai Lama and Tibet are portrayed by Hollywood is a subject of great debate among the Tibetan people and monks. Perceptions created are of great concern to Tibetologists because of the dangerous effects these misrepresentations may have in the short and long term and the great damage they may produce at the spiritual and political level. Representing the Dalai Lama as a Buddha and a god/king with absolute love and wisdom, reducing Tibetan Buddhism to a ceremonial show, and turning Tibet into a utopia may have some devastating consequences on Tibet and Dalai Lama.

The real danger could be observed along three major fronts. First, the reproduction of Tibet as an idealistic place that is deprived of a real identity, history, or belonging beyond the sacred is irresponsible. Second, the misrepresentation of Tibetan Buddhism, while ignoring the essence of the religion and distorting dharma knowledge and Buddha teachings, is dangerous and insulting. Finally, the replacement of the Tibetan culture with a romanticized one that represents the Westerns fantasies of a perfect culture free from all materialistic forms of thought is unrealistic.

More important is the issue of the fourteenth Dalai Lama. He undoubtedly is a great man who inspires great devotion, but what happens after he leaves this earthly realm? Will there be another actor with the charisma and power he holds to motivate action? China hopes his death will end the struggle for independence, and they may be right if the Lama is constructed in such a way that he can never be replaced.

Idealizing Tibet and romanticizing its fight against China has negative effects due to the tendency for some to view this fight from an idealistic rather than a realistic perspective. Hollywood movies represent historical events in Sino-Tibetan conflict within a context that surpasses their actual time

and place to gain a universal, everlasting dimension. This apocalyptic fight created by the Hollywood filmmakers to satisfy the Western audience is unrealistic and, even worse, impossible for Tibet to win. Hollywood is creating a messianic mission, a situation never likely to be resolved if placed in such stark terms. Hollywood managed to draw the West's attention toward the Tibet issue and to gain its sympathy for Tibetan suffering but failed to engage the Western public pragmatically and effectively in the Tibetan struggle for freedom. In his letter published in *Tricycle*, K Togden, a Tibetan monk living in the United States, shows some serious concerns about the idealizations the filmmakers use in their movies to advance human rights issues in Tibet that might have opposite effects. Togden agrees with the point of view of some scholars considering that the real Tibet is gone, the Chinese occupation is permanent, and Hollywood cannot change Tibet's fate: "In fact, the 'Tibetan cause' as presented to us is much like the *Titanic*, doomed from the beginning…audiences are enjoying *Titanic*—I believe much more than they will *Kundun*. Although *Titanic* contains a lot of fantasy and romance, it is much more honest…The movies about Tibet are not honest—they purposely create a make-believe reality. If we fall for it, we know we are going to be disappointed in the end, sooner or later. Such sufferings arise from attachment and ignorance."[25]

The major concern of Tibetologists is that the representation of Tibet by the West has replaced the real Tibet with a new one totally invented by the Western media and entertainment sectors. Hollywood played a major part in promoting the idealistic Tibet and internationalizing its struggle in the attempt to save it, but the consequences were reversed. Hollywood has participated in the process of annihilating Tibet and Tibetan culture. It has contributed to destroying what is left of the image of the real Tibet in the Western public sphere and among Western scholars. This modern fantastical image of Tibet, fabricated in the Hollywood dream factory, started to crawl into the minds of the Tibetans and circulate among the Tibetan Diasporas and Tibetan Buddhist community. Regarding the dilemma of the idealization of Tibet, Tibetologist Donald Lopez states,

> Fantasies of Tibet have in the past three decades inspired much support for the cause of Tibetan independence. But those fantasies are ultimately a threat to the realization of that goal. It is not simply that learning that Tibet was not the place we dreamed it to be might result in some "disillusionment." It is rather that to allow Tibet to circulate as a constituent in a system of fantastic oppositions (even when Tibetans are the "good" Orientals) is to deny Tibet its history, to exclude Tibet from a real world of which it has always been a part, and to deny Tibetans their role as agents participating in the creation of a contested quotidian reality. To the extent that we continue to believe that Tibet prior to 1950 was a utopia, the Tibet of 1994 will be no place.[26]

The Hollywood effect in the case of internationalizing the Tibet cause is quite another dilemma. Hollywood raised awareness and sympathy toward Tibet at the global level and thus contributed in complicating the situation between China and the Dalai Lama. This situation has raised the tensions between the two parties; that the situation is now public and well known makes for little maneuverability on both sides. There has been an increase in the popularity of the Dalai Lama and a rising awareness within the Western public about the Tibetan struggle, and this has only made the Chinese more hostile toward Tibet and the Dalai Lama in particular: "[Hollywood's] campaign outraged the nationalist and xenophobic Chinese leadership."[27] Hollywood, by internationalizing the

Tibet cause not only has failed to serve Tibet's interests but it also brought more trouble to Tibet and its leadership. Hollywood's support to the Dalai Lama's international campaign to gain support for Tibet's self-determination had more negative than positive effects on Tibet, as some experts on the Tibet issue, such as Patrick French, argue. French advises the Dalai Lama to close down the Hollywood strategy that proved over time to be more trouble than it is was worth: "The Dalai Lama should have closed down the Hollywood strategy a decade ago and focused on back-channel diplomacy with Beijing. He should have publicly renounced the claim to a so-called Greater Tibet, which demands territory that was never under the control of the Lhasa government. Sending his envoys to talk about talks with the Chinese while simultaneously encouraging the global pro-Tibet lobby has achieved nothing."[28]

Examining Hollywood's impact from a wider dimension may lead to a different understanding of its contribution in altering international events. Regardless of the strong criticisms about Hollywood's involvement in Tibet's cause and the subsequent debate about its limited or negative effects, Hollywood has succeeded in gaining powerful permanent support from the public at the Western and international level for Tibet independence. Hollywood, through idealizing Tibet and internationalizing its struggle, has produced some powerful positive effects that overcome the Tibetologists' and Tibetans' concerns for providing Tibet with an unconventional defense strategy, leading to a permanent penetration of Free Tibet into the global community while turning the divine land of the Dalai Lama to an unconquerable mind power. Hollywood established Tibet as a free nation in the minds and memories of people in the West and all over the world. What Hollywood created out of Tibet goes much beyond the geographic place with a certain regime and governmental instruments. Hollywood has liberated Tibet from China by turning it into a spiritual, magical power that no country will manage to rule.

The 1990s were a remarkable time for Chinese and Tibetan policy. For a short time, a global policy issue came to the forefront in the artistic community. The danger remains that this rising awareness only makes the situation more intractable for the Chinese. The West seems to have backed away from the struggle while the Chinese have only intensified their control over the region. Both sides are at an impasse now with revolution brewing in Tibet, but the Chinese are unwilling to make concessions so as to avoid appearing weak to the West and bowing down to the film industry. It is from this position that agenda setting can be productive in making certain considerations widespread interests, but these interests need to be sustained and analyzed, not just communicated with little support.

Hollywood and the West need to keep highlighting the Tibet issue, but they need to do more than simply setting the agenda to highlight certain issues, they need to be active players in Tibet issues and get seriously involved in the process of producing positive changes in the Sino-Tibetan conflict. This is why the issue-based approach is so important. While agenda setting is important in putting an issue on the table, the salience, timing, region, past history, and current political processes are important for determining when an issue will come to the forefront of relations. Tibet became an important issue, but for the last decade it was no longer critical or salient to the Western public debate over Chinese issues. China was able to place Tibet on the backburner, and Hollywood and the West avoided real action on the issue in the face of more serious concerns regarding economic marketplaces and commerce, as we will detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 8
The Paradox of Globalization

Hollywood's Ethnocultural Context Encounters the Global Marketplace

The twentieth century was clearly America's century; for much of the time the United States was the dominant economic, military, and cultural power. Short periods of isolationism (1930s and early 1990s) were countered with intense periods of global engagement and hegemonic ambition. At the close of the century, the United States was the clear economic leader, last remaining global military power, and had started the construction of a New World Order that was only upset with a series of terrorist attacks that have gone on to shape the course of the twenty-first century.

Holding the power to alter global events, the United States has always conducted its foreign policy according to its essential Western values, including democracy, freedom, and human rights. These values, according to some in the United States, should be universalized to enhance justice and peace throughout the world. This perspective is clearly at odds with other regional perspectives that do not value democracy or have different visions of what human rights really entails.

When encountering other cultures, Westerners often forget their values are contextualized toward local settings. A universal approach fails in China; Westerners formulated an image of a remote and mysterious country according to their own fantasies and illusions. The early Western images of China were created mostly by people such as missionaries and priests who perceived the Far Eastern people as inferior, pagans, backward, barbarians, and desperately in need of Christianity's teachings and Western culture to save them from their ignorance and weakness. In the modern era, Hollywood's filmmakers, producers, scriptwriters, actors, and others replaced the priests in their mission to enlighten the Chinese people living in the darkness. Hollywood has become both the evangelical actor for the Western perspective and also the cultural lens by which the West views the East. Due to its perspective, the West projects negative images of China but also is responsible for stimulating an interest in the region.

On top of these confusing priorities, add the need to maintain the globalization project and continue economic development necessary for any great power. Hollywood's political movies throughout history have been a mirror to the American ideals. Ian Scott describes this view in his book *American Politics in Hollywood Films*: "The ideals of liberalism, democracy, egalitarianism, pluralism, populism, and messianism, to name only the most obvious, are themes that suggest social equity, the

value of the economic market and the limited role of the government, and which form the collective nucleus that is Americanism. From D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915 to Mike Nicholls's *Primary Colors* in 1998, these ideals are the substantive ideological precepts upon which political films operate."[1]

Hollywood represents American values in the cultural, political, and economic sense, and this produces a paradox. How can the West simultaneously create a safe space for its economic project while at the same time criticize its new partner for failing to match its core values concerning respect for individual rights?

Hollywood, the Tibet Movement, and Orientalism

Hollywood's depiction of the Asian region, and more particularly of China, has been impaired by the filmmakers' ethnocentrism, providing additional support for Said's Orientalism conjecture, which suggests that the West studies and describes the Orient for the purpose of ruling over it: "Orientalism is a set of cultural meanings for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[2] Through the lens of Hollywood, it is tough to discount the truth of Orientalism as a perspective.

Said's Orientalism focuses mainly on the cultural rupture between Asia and the West; the Orient is inferior, backward, and vicious, and the West is civilized, rational, and righteous. The movies that have been the focus of this book continue this theme in a slightly more modern way. They make the same points, suggesting that China is inferior, backward, and vicious, but they do so through comparison with the cultural norms of the West rather than cartoonish depictions of the "other." Modern Orientalism is much craftier about suggesting there is a problem with the East; this problem is suggested by comparison rather than outright depictions of maniacal evil like the Fu Manchu character.

Backward images of China were brought back to the screen in a different form in the 1980s through Bertolucci's *Last Emperor*. However, Hollywood Orientalist cinema's most powerful comeback took place in the 1990s with the three movies that form the core of our book, *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner*. Hollywood's use of China in modern terms is analogous to the concept of cultural conversion as used by Said: "The Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something to something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture, in some cases for what he believes is the sake of the Oriental. This process of conversion is a disciplined one: it is taught, it has its own societies, periodicals, traditions, vocabulary, rhetoric, all in basic ways connected to and supplied by the prevailing cultural and political norms of the West."[3]

Western filmmakers, scriptwriters, and actors aimed, through their activities, protests, statements, and movies, to rescue the voiceless Tibetans from the tyrannical Chinese. Said's Orientalism remains strong but modified by what might be called New Orientalism. The clash is no longer between the West and the East, but between the people of the East and the leaders of various states like China, Japan, and Indonesia, as pushed along by the West. In Hollywood movies, the West should rescue Asia from itself. Concerning the new age Orientalism of which Lopez speaks, Eve Mullen explains in her study *Orientalist Commercializations: Tibetan Buddhism in American Popular Film* the four important characteristics the new age Orientalism:

> [The first characteristic is] this play of opposites [East-West] still operates in new age Orientalism; the positions, however, are changed, creating anew the fantasy land of Shangri-La. Tibet becomes the perfect civilization, pristine, timeless, harmonious and holy as the home of true Buddhism and a true utopia. The Tibetan people become superhuman, perfect citizens under a perfect leader. The new opposition becomes China the invader, godless and demonic, despotic and polluted. Chinese soldiers become subhuman murderers following the orders of subhuman leaders. The rescue roles are still in place, as well. However, this time the contemporary goal is not the rescue of the East for the West, but the rescue of Tibet from China, the East from the East.[4]

In this construct, the West sees itself as the arbitrator of what is right and just in this world. Hollywood's heroic rescue mission can be interpreted through this frame. The West is the hero with a mission to save the weak hopeless Tibetans from the Chinese villains. Here we can speak of the second characteristic of new age Orientalism as Mullen explains in her study of the aggrandizement of the rescuers: "The Western rescuers are allowed to be the heroes of the Tibetan cause, edifying the American self-portrait as one of a strong, moral champion nation in which equality and justice are forever upheld. As this portrait raises western heroes, it damagingly lowers the Tibetans to a position of monopolized voicelessness."[5]

This position leads to the third characteristic, "the gaining of authority or control over Tibet,"[6] and the fourth characteristic, "the justification of that authority."[7] The Hollywood rescuers present themselves as democratic saviors and aim to spread the Western democratic/capitalist system over to China so they may save the Tibetan and the Chinese people from the Communist regime that is cruel and oppressive. Jon Avnet, *Red Corner*'s producer and director, states,

> My dream scenario for the film's impact is that it helps to spur a real debate over human rights in China and the other issues that are on the table such as the Dalai Lama and Tibet. I would like to see this go to the front burner. I would like not to give MFN and entrance to the World Trade Organization to the Chinese government unless they behave and they will and I think we should just take a tough position. This film is not a political film, it's an entertaining film but it deals with the subject that is highly political. When you see it, it is distressing to watch the way the criminal justice works with an American in China. Can you imagine what happens to people who have no names? Who're just Chinese citizens? One of the 6,100 who are executed this year that we know of.[8]

The three movies in question follow this path. While there is mention of a clash of cultures between the East and the West, the real conflict is an internal conflict between those of a better nature (Tibetans for example) and the Chinese ruling class as seen and guided by the West. Throughout *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* we hear the monks talking about the grievances and massacres committed by the Chinese against the Tibetans while trying to rule over their land. *Seven Years in Tibet* reveals the devotion of the Western mountain climber Heinrich Harrer toward the Dalai Lama and the technological developments he introduced to Tibet, such as the establishment of the movie theater and the radio, thus connecting the most remote and isolated country to the rest of the world.

The implication here is both that the Chinese are holding back Tibet but also that salvation lies through the technology of the West. Of course these events are exaggerated and made up, yet they serve the purpose of putting Tibet in its proper place and of demonizing the Chinese and the Tibetan leaders for not providing this Western good in the first place.

Moreover, *Red Corner* represents the Chinese legal system as corrupted, the Chinese regime as tyrannical, and the Chinese people as childlike and obedient. This is not the country dominating the global marketplace in the real world; this is an artificial construction according to the makers of the film. The movie features the brainwashing technique used over the Chinese people that turns them vicious or ignorant, blind followers of the regime. The idea of loss of individual agency is common in these films.

Red Corner introduces Shen Yuelin, Jack's attorney, as a smart, educated, and self-confident woman only to let the audience find out near the end that she is naïve and a victim of the Chinese system's brainwashing. She becomes a brainwasher herself, trying to convince Jack of the proficiency of a Communist system. All this is meant to invoke the greatest paranoid Hollywood fear, that of the *Manchurian Candidate*. Harold Isaacs mentions in his book *Scratches on Our Minds: American views of China and India* that one of the most powerful new images of the Chinese that have been emerging since the 1950s in the West is the image of the Chinese as brainwashers.[9]

The image of the Chinese as manipulators of people's minds has its roots during the Korean War when the fear was that the Chinese were brainwashing American prisoners. While brainwashing of American prisoners likely either never happened or happened with such rarity that it is superfluous to discuss it in such a serious manner, the belief that this was true has taken hold. It is more important to examine the process internally in the East. The Chinese and North Koreans have used various forms of thought control and modification of their citizens to resocialize them. Many books and research have been published about Chinese brainwashing (a better term might be reeducation) including *Thought Reform* by Robert Lifton and *Coercive Persuasion* by Edgar Schein, in addition to a series of books and articles written by Edward Hunter.

Despite the disconnect with reality, the Chinese brainwashing theme gained popularity and became one of the favorite topics of the Western media. Robert Neville of *Time* magazine shows through a study he conducted on brainwashing in China in 1951 that "'incorrect' thoughts in Red China may be punished by anything up to death. 'Correct' thoughts can often be the sure path to success. This probably explains why millions of mainland Chinese are engaged in hsueh hsi (thought control) and why China has a dedicated army which rarely breaks, an efficient and incorruptible corps of administrators, and a zealous youth ready to believe that black is white and to die for that warped belief."[10]

Red Corner is a vivid demonstration of the Chinese brainwashing process as it persists in the memory of the American public. The brainwashing technique is revealed through the different means used during the interrogation of Jack, not only to force him to plead guilty, but also to convince him of the correctness and righteousness of the Chinese legal system. Even though the brainwashing technique failed with Jack, it has been very successful on the Chinese people, who are represented in the movie through Shen Yuelin. She demonstrates the impressive ability of the technique in her speeches to Jack outlining the advantages of the Communist regime and appears just like the American victim of Chinese brainwashing described in Hunter's book *Brainwashing: From Pavlov to Powers*: "[The victim's] speech seemed impressed on a disc that had to be played from start to

finish, without modification or halt. He appeared to be under a weird, unnatural compulsion to go on with a whole train of thought, from beginning to end, even when it had been rendered silly…He was no longer capable of using free will or adapting himself to a situation for which he had been uninstructed; he had to go on as if manipulated by instincts alone. This was Party discipline extended to the mind. A trance element was in it."[11]

Red Corner ends with the American individualism and enthusiasm for democracy and freedom managing to break the cycle of the Chinese brainwashing. Jack, the American businessman, helps Shen Yuelin to liberate herself from the Communist regime and see the truth. Unfortunately this is also a constructed fantasy of the West. The Chinese are brainwashed in their thoughts and actions, and only the power of the West, with its democracy and freedoms, can free the Chinese from their bondage. A more nuanced view would criticize the Chinese legal system for its inadequacies while also admitting the necessity of some of the strict measures for a developing country. The legacy of struggle for the Communist regime has led to this point in history where it is both modernizing and adapting but also trying to hold on to its past control of the system. Undoubtedly there will be growing pains, and the West can help China get past its development state to move toward a more equitable system, but the West cannot contribute positively to the innovation process taking place in China through the power of its reason alone.

Prospect and Agenda of the Multibillion-Dollar Hollywood Enterprise

Kundun, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner* create in the audience destructive images of China and the Chinese while also attacking aggressively the Chinese government for its continuous violation of human rights and its occupation of Tibet. This process of image formation and agenda setting had severe consequences on Hollywood at the business level. The choices made by the studios, actors, and directors were not made in a vacuum; effectively, these movies led to a closed system (in China) for the Western entertainment industry. To this day, only a few Western films are allowed distribution in China, and these films are carefully screened and vetted.

Hollywood and Capitalism

Hollywood is a huge venture operating within the capitalist system; entertainment is a critical part of the money-making infrastructure. Hollywood likes to suggest it makes dreams come true, but in reality they make economic dreams come true. It is an entertainment business enterprise with the goal of making financial gains by producing movies that make profits and achieve success at the local and global box office.

At various times in history, the US government and Hollywood have collaborated to serve their mutual economic and political interests. The government collaborates on various films that serve the US national ethos, such as *Saving Private Ryan*, *Top Gun*, or the recent *Act of Valor*. The US government also provides significant support for a Hollywood film to enter the foreign market, with "federal bureaucracies continually pressing in various forums of trade negotiation for foreign governments to open their doors more widely to Hollywood films. Indeed, Hollywood has always received abundant help from the US State Department, the Commerce Department, and other agencies of federal government."[12] The goal is to get closed markets to eventually open their doors to the

American products and culture.

An example of this convergence of interests between US government and Hollywood is represented by “the Marshall Plan for Europe (1948–51) whose provisions linked levels of aid directly to recipients’ willingness to accept imports of US motion pictures.”[13] The goal of this requirement was to expand the market for Hollywood productions and also help the US economy in general. It also served as a form of soft power to promote American values during the height of the Cold War.

Later, the US government played a major role in promoting Hollywood movies in China while securing a favorable environment for their release. Jack Valenti, Motion Picture Association of America chairman and CEO, succeeded in ameliorating the conditions the Chinese placed on Hollywood movies after 1997. Each year, China only allows roughly twenty foreign films into its marketplace. In 2007, it banned American films completely in response to a trade row between the United States, the WTO, and China. The United States is concerned with opening the Chinese market, but it also has to deal with counterfeiting, which is a big detriment to the ability of Hollywood films to make a profit in China and some regions of the world. Problems continue, and the *Los Angeles Times* noted in 2011 that getting a film into China is tougher than crossing the Great Wall.

China is now the third largest producer of movies in the world. To protect its people and market, China has a strict process of approval for any film shown in China. The process is worth the struggle for many Hollywood studios since the market has exploded to surpass over a $1 billion in revenues. The future may be of great collaboration between Chinese and American studios to gain entry into the Chinese market, like the recent remake of *The Karate Kid* (2010). Likely, entry into the Chinese market will require American studios to no longer make films that export American values but instead focus on global or regional values.

China and Hollywood in History

Hollywood-China relations date back to the 1930s, yet as soon as the Communist Party took over, it closed its doors to foreign goods and investments. In 1994, China reopened its market to Hollywood productions. American movie studios saw in China a potentially untapped gold mine. As soon as the PRC government allowed American movies to reenter China, Hollywood studios raced to get their share of the market. Some Hollywood movies were a big success in China while others fell below expectations. Among the imported movies in the first year, ten films occupied 70 percent of the Chinese market. Movies such as *The Fugitive*, *Forrest Gump*, *Titanic*, and more recently *Avatar* were popular among the Chinese public. The potential for profit in the Chinese market is what will push Hollywood to a more conciliatory view of China.

The Hollywood industry had to overcome many difficulties to succeed in the Chinese market. One main obstacle was the cultural differences between the two civilizations. Disney’s *Mulan* was criticized as an Americanized version of China’s fairytale *Hua Mulan*. How would a movie like *Captain America* be promoted in China? The answer, it turned out, was to rename it the *First Avenger*. Hollywood also faced many restrictions imposed by the PRC government, which welcomed Hollywood yet considered it as a threat to the local film industry as well as to the Chinese people’s culture and ideology. Other major difficulties the Hollywood industry had to deal with, besides piracy, as indicated in Stanley’s study *The Wolf at the Door: Hollywood and the Film Market in*

China, include the following:

1. The monopoly over imported films exercised by the China Film Corporation
2. The prohibition Hollywood studios face in distributing their films directly
3. Restrictions on foreign investment in the film industry
4. The informal quota that limits the number of imported films each year
5. The structure of the taxation/import duty regulations that imposes a variety of fees and taxes on imported films
6. Censorship[14]

However, many of Chinese restrictions regarding Hollywood movies were subject to negotiation between the two parties. In the late 1990s, Hollywood studios managed to achieve some success regarding several issues, such as the quota that limits the imported movies. The PRC government promised to double the quota—from ten to twenty films per year—if Congress approved normal trade relations with China. It also showed its willingness to permit an additional twenty foreign films in specific conditions. Now the number is set at twenty films but fluctuates a bit. The major dilemma that Hollywood faced while dealing with China was political intervention in Hollywood movies. The PRC government considers political necessities as having a priority over commercial concerns. In the late 1990s the Chinese government not only censored Hollywood movies, but it also tried to intimidate Hollywood companies from producing movies that contradicted its political views. Moreover, the Chinese-Hollywood relationship was strongly linked to foreign policies. Any change at the diplomatic level between China and the United States would have devastating consequences on Hollywood, as was the case in the aftermath of the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. China banned all American movies from May to October in 1999 and again in 2007 due to a trade dispute.

Even with the many problems that Hollywood faced in China, Hollywood was fully aware of the enormity of the Chinese market. Hollywood movies depend a great deal on the foreign marketplace since the decline in revenues associated with DVD and VHS sales; what often makes a movie profitable is calculated on how much it sells abroad. Often, movies will no longer be green lit if they are not accessible to the global market.

The Chinese Ban on Hollywood in 1997

A major crisis between Hollywood and China occurred in 1997 in the aftermath of the release of three Hollywood movies critical of China—*Kundun, Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner*. The movies were released at a time when Hollywood was planning for a major expansion in China, so the stakes were high. Hollywood conglomerates had been negotiating new business arrangements with the PRC government. For example, Disney had been discussing with the Chinese authority the opening of a Disney World-type theme park in China:

> In December 1996, before either *Seven Years in Tibet* or *Kundun* was completed, a transpacific

cinematic cold war erupted. The Chinese Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television declared through its spokesman in Beijing, Kong Min, that because *Kundun* "intended to glorify the Dalai Lama," it constituted a form of "interference in China's internal affairs." The vice director of the ministry, Yang Buting, came right to the point. Because, he said, Disney had "indicated a lack of respect for Chinese sovereignty," China was "thinking over our business with Disney." It was quickly rumored that Disney might actually be excluded from future deals.[15]

The consequences of the release of the three anti-China movies were wide ranging and represented the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars. The PRC government rejected the three movies and put a ban on the studios that produced and distributed them—MGM for *Red Corner*, Sony/Columbia/TriStar for *Seven Years in Tibet*, and Touchstone/Disney for *Kundun*. Martin Scorsese, Richard Gere, Jon Avnet, Brad Pitt, and Melissa Mathison, along with other professionals involved in the making of the three movies and other Hollywood representatives who defended Tibet, were banned from entering China, some for life.

Hollywood companies, considering their relations with China as first priority, dealt with the problem swiftly. These companies' interests in the Chinese market are not limited to movies but a wider range of investments; therefore they sent high ranking representatives to China to restore relations: "The Disney Company, which made *Kundun*, became so alarmed at the damage the film might do to its other financial investments in China (Disney stores and merchandise) that it hired Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State in the Nixon Administration, to represent its interests."[16] Later, Disney sent its chief executive officer, Michael Eisner, to meet with Chinese authorities. The Chinese officials criticized Hollywood and the United States for insulting China in their movies, as well as for sending American cultural products to China while in return refusing to distribute Chinese movies in the United States. To settle the conflict, Eisner approved the distribution of two Chinese movies in the United States. Despite all the efforts, the ban over Disney products was not lifted until February 1999, and *Mulan* was finally released in China. By the end of 2000, all three Hollywood companies had their ban rescinded.

Jack Valenti, the former MPAA chief who worked very hard to open the Chinese market to Hollywood products, took extensive efforts to connect with the Chinese government to solve the film crisis. Valenti related to the reporters after a quick visit to China, in May 1998, what he said to the Chinese officials: "I pointed out that of the nearly 900 films which were made in the US over the last two years only three were considered objectionable; *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner*. I also told them that just as I and my colleagues have to try to understand Chinese culture, they have to understand that in America we honor freedom of expression to such a degree that it is part of our Constitution."[17]

Hollywood and the film industry, being a form of art and/or entertainment, have always been connected to politics in some way. It is tough to separate art and creativity from the political context in which the medium operates. Moreover, this was not the first time Hollywood found itself paying a high price for producing movies with strong cultural political messages. From the late 1940s to the 1950s, the era of McCarthyism swept through Hollywood. Joseph McCarthy and his House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigated the infiltration of Communism into the US government, the film industry, and other forms of culture. Due to the sweeping hysteria of the era,

anyone suspected of being sympathetic of Communism in general was informally banned from Hollywood: "The investigation continued until well into the 1950s, destroying many careers and helping others, and influencing the kinds of movies that were or were not made."[18] Hollywood once again found itself embroiled in a political scandal, but this time it was China that was accusing Hollywood of threatening its national security.

Hollywood paid a very high price for siding with Tibet in its struggle against China. While some pushed for openness and dialogue with China, others pushed for containment and disengagement from the state. China's ban on Hollywood production companies made them revise their priorities and think economically rather than politically. In two years, 1997–1998, Hollywood made nine hundred films, three of which were considered provocative by the Chinese government. However, since 1997, in more than 14 years, Hollywood has made thousands of films, yet almost none of these films dare to challenge China or even to mention the Tibetans' struggle for freedom. Those few films that do deal with Tibet do so without mention of China and are produced independently from the Hollywood system. The next ban imposed by China (2007) was not a result of provocative films but rather US policy of reporting China to the WTO for not protecting intellectual copyrights.

Where Does Tibet Stand in Hollywood in the Twenty First Century?

The growing interest in the global marketplace has led to a shift in priorities for the Hollywood system. No longer can films be simply American in viewpoint; they have to be global in perspective. George Lucas recently remarked that no Hollywood studio would distribute his film *Red Tails* (2012), about an all-black American air unit during World War II, since the film only featured black actors and was of no interest to the global market. The Chinese film market has witnessed an unprecedented boost at the beginning of the twenty-first century, encouraging local and foreign investors to engage the Chinese film industry. China's film market is ranked today as number four after the United States, the European Union, and Japan. China is in the process of surpassing Japan as a producer and now ranks third in terms of film production behind the United States and India. In 2005, the Chinese box office amounted to $250 million, but by 2010, China's box office receipts reached $1.5 billion and are projected to reach $7 billion in 2015.[19]

Even though the quota system in China allows only the distribution of twenty foreign films per year, Hollywood has made tremendous profits in China. Hollywood blockbusters are widely anticipated in the Chinese market at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Table 8.1 represents the approximate box office (according to MojoBoxOffice.com) results of 14 Hollywood movies released between 2007 and 2010 in the United States, foreign markets, and China.

Table 8.1 Movie profits (Unit: million USD)

Movies	*Release date*	*Profit in domestic market*	*Profit in foreign market*	*Profit in Chinese market*
Spider-Man 3	2007	$337	$555	$19
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	2007	$292	$646	$20

Transformers	2007	$320	$390	$38
Casino Royale	2007	$168	$427	$12
The Forbidden Kingdom	2008	$52	$76	$29
Kung Fu Panda	2008	$216	$417	$26
Quantum of Solace	2008	$169	$418	$21
The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor	2008	$103	$299	$18
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	2009	$402	$434	$66
2012	2009	$166	$604	$70
Avatar	2009	$760	$2021	$200
Inception	2010	$293	$533	$70
Alice in Wonderland	2010	$334	$690	$35
The Expendables	2010	$103	$172	$33
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part I	2010	$295	$657	$34

Since the twenty-first century began, China has been portrayed positively overall by Hollywood to ensure its success in the Chinese market and in the global market. Hollywood is fully aware that success in the global market relies mainly on satisfying its entire public audience, not just Americans. Thus Hollywood found it crucial to make some significant changes in its strategy, making a major shift or even creating a reverse in its protagonists and antagonists. Hollywood ethnocentrism has been driving its filmmakers to produce movies projecting the United States' supremacy, and Chinese corruption has been standing as a barrier to its global expansion. The image of the United States has been declining overall due to many factors, including the economic depression of 2008 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile China's image is rising fast as its huge economic development continues at a rapid pace and it continues to invest in the progress of many states throughout the world. A poll of 22 countries conducted in 2005 for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland shows that

> China is viewed as having a mainly positive influence in the world by a majority or plurality of citizens in 14 countries. On average across all countries polled (excluding China itself), almost half (48%) see China's influence as positive and just 30 percent see it as negative, with another 22 percent being noncommittal. [As for comparing China to the United States the poll shows that] China is viewed much more positively than two other major powers, the US and Russia, which are viewed quite negatively. Russia is viewed as having a negative influence in the world by citizens of fourteen countries and a positive influence in just five, with an average across all countries of 36 percent viewing it positively and 40 percent negatively. The US is also viewed negatively in fifteen countries and positively in just six, with an average of 38 percent viewing it positively and 47 percent negatively.[20]

Hollywood sees in China its ticket to enter not just the Chinese market but the global market as well. Chinese-American film industry relations are growing stronger every day. Private Chinese companies are investing in Hollywood movies through sponsorship or product placement. Moreover, Hollywood coproductions with Chinese partners have started to flourish. This partnership opens the Chinese market to Hollywood widely as it overcomes barriers such as the quota of twenty films and other regulations set for foreign movies. "'There's no reason we should have Chinese films and American films anymore. There should be global films,' Ryan Kavanaugh, the chief executive of Relativity Media, said when unveiling his independent studio's joint venture in Beijing in August 2011."[21] Most coproduction movies are making good profit in China while several have achieved a great success worldwide, such as *The Forbidden Kingdom* ($130 million) and *The Karate Kid* ($360 million).

In a major step to encourage the coproduction trend, the Chinese government authorized the China Film Co-Production Corporation (CFCC), founded in 1979, "to administer, coordinate and serve the Chinese-foreign film co-productions."[22] The company has strong connections with more than fifty foreign countries and "has been trying to attract directors, producers, and writers from overseas to come to China and make films."[23] It became in 1999 a part of a state-owned media conglomerate China Film Group (CFG)—China's foremost media conglomerate that combines eight Chinese media and film companies such as the original China Film Company, plus Beijing Film Studio, China Children's Film Studio, China Film Co-production Corporation, China Film Equipment Corporation, China Movie Channel (CCTV-6), Beijing Film Developing and Printing and Video Laboratory, and Huayun Film and Television Compact Discs Company.[24] Being a part of this huge conglomerate puts the CFCC at the center of Chinese film production operations and provides it with wider margin to move as intermediary between Chinese film industry and other foreign film industries that may offer the energy and dynamism to improve dramatically its performance and accelerate significantly the process of coproduction. The CFCC had a primary role in coproduction movies between Hollywood and China, such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Forbidden Kingdom*, which hit major success in the US market and globally.

While Chinese private companies and the film industry based their relations with Hollywood on business grounds, the Chinese government has a more political agenda in dealing with Hollywood. The Chinese government's first concern is to have a global voice. Thus China started encouraging and supporting its local media and film industry to expand globally. The Chinese government's enthusiasm

regarding media globalization was positively received by the Chinese media organizations: "While the Chinese media practitioners are eager to take globalization as an opportunity to get a share of the global media market, the Chinese authorities are more eager to have China's voices in the world's political, economic and cultural forums, thus exerting more China's soft power in the world."[25]

Soft power is a key concept in international relations. Its basic premise is that cultural power or the power of entertainment, food, and the arts can be more important and influential than any form of military power. The power of ideas can sway a country or individual to change their perspective much easier than the force of a gun. This new recognition of power has not escaped either the Chinese or Americans. Both are now locked in a global cultural battle of influence, sometimes working together, sometimes working in opposition, but always with the greater goal of the expansion of power and influence in the system. The Chinese media and film industry has started to receive acceptance at the global market since the beginning of twenty-first century. The expansion of the Chinese movies in foreign markets could provide significant support to the Chinese government, making possible for smooth dissemination of its political views in the West.

China has been seeking to attract foreign media and film industries to join the local media in promoting China's positive image to promote its soft power capabilities. The Chinese government considers Hollywood as a powerful global means of communication and has been seeking to move the industry to its side. The goal is to promote its own voice in the world by using a punishment/reward economic strategy. The government banned Sony/Columbia for releasing *Seven Years in Tibet* in 1997, causing the company huge financial losses as the government perceived the movie as demoralizing China. However, with Sony's production and distribution in 2009 of *2012*—a movie glorifying China in some ways—the relationship between the company and China witnessed the beginning of a golden age. With revenue of $70 million, *2012* achieved great success at the Chinese box office.

What is evident today is that Hollywood is unwilling to test the Chinese authority's tolerance regarding movies demoralizing China and its people; Hollywood production companies are eliminating the Chinese villains from their movies or replacing them with other characters such as Russians or terrorists. MGM has replaced the Chinese villains with North Koreans in its *Red Dawn* remake: "The filmmakers now are digitally erasing Chinese flags and military symbols from 'Red Dawn,' substituting dialogue and altering the film to depict much of the invading force as being from North Korea, an isolated country where American media companies have no dollars at stake."[26] This is a significant concession to Chinese tastemakers but a necessary adaptation to the global markets whims.

China seeks to provide the right incentives to encourage Hollywood to participate in promoting China's positive image globally. China is also aiming to buy one of the major Hollywood production companies and has already bought the second-largest film distribution company in AMC Theaters. Liu Wei writes in his article, "It was rumored that a company from China was among the bidders for Miramax, a Disney subsidiary. By all accounts, it failed 'in the competition' then, but that was just the first round."[27] Liu states, "In Beijing, the government is playing its part in pushing the influence of Chinese culture worldwide—which may serve to provide the impetus for more such cooperation between the Chinese media and Hollywood. Ben Ji, president of Angel Wings Entertainment, a Beijing-based film financing and production group says 'you can tell the government's aspiration to promote Chinese culture by the mushrooming Confucius Institutes overseas…And Hollywood is

arguably an effective channel to achieve that goal, thanks to its distribution network and global influence.'"[28]

China has been gaining the support of Hollywood's big production companies and American media moguls through establishing with them a unique economic relationship that is getting deeper and stronger with time. The China-Disney collaboration through different business enterprises reached its peak in 2011 with a Disney theme park. The project will be built outside Shanghai at a cost of $3.7 billion and spread over one thousand acres of land: "Disney's plans are ambitious: If further development of the resort happens as expected over the coming decades—still a big if—it will encompass more than 1,700 acres and have a capacity rivaling Disney World in Florida, which attracts about 45 million annual visitors."[29]

Even though it is a Western-led investment, Walt Disney Company president and CEO Robert A. Iger, during a ceremony held upon the start of construction, said, "Our Shanghai resort will be a world-class family vacation destination that combines classic Disney characters and storytelling with the uniqueness and beauty of China. Working with our Chinese partners, the Shanghai Disney Resort will be both authentically Disney and distinctly Chinese." Moreover, the Disney theme park will be comanaged with Disney's joint venture partner, Shanghai Shendi Group, a conglomerate of government-owned companies taking the majority stake at 57 percent. While Disney is hoping for huge profits out of the project, China sees in it a means of attraction for tourists from all over the world. An additional benefit for Disney will be the expansion of their ability to reach Chinese audiences through this form of cultural penetration.

Hollywood production companies started in the late twentieth century merging with megamedia conglomerates: "The 1980s had witnessed media mergers in Hollywood that put studios under the control of mega-media conglomerates that provided long term financial stability for the studios and prioritized films that fit a narrow logic of multiplying revenues. Hollywood in the 2000s has been increasingly consolidated into larger media firms and the cinema experience has been expanded beyond the confines of theaters."[30] The success of this experience encouraged the Chinese film industry to adopt Hollywood merging strategy to increase profits: "The Chinese audiovisual industry, directed by the Chinese state, has opted to follow the same strategy and it has already begun to bear fruit. In 2004, for the first time in decades, China produced more than two hundred movies and total industry revenue increased 66 percent to almost $435 million."[31]

Moreover, China has managed to win some of the largest Western media conglomerates to its side; they see the 1.3 billion person market and the possibility of huge profits. Rupert Murdoch, an Australian-American multibillionaire, is the main shareholder, chairman, and CEO of News Corporation, which is "the world's third largest media conglomerate, with a value of $68 billion, and one of the few mega-corporations controlled by a single individual."[32] Murdoch sees in China some great financial opportunities, even if his investments in China have not met his high expectations. Murdoch, married for the third time to a Chinese businesswoman named Wendi Deng, has been trying to expand his business empire into China since the early 1990s. To expand and protect his enterprises in China, Murdoch established strong relations with influential figures in the Chinese regime and often defended and supported the Chinese authorities. Examples of such are illustrated in Tables 8.2 and 8.3.

Table 8.2 Murdoch's support of the Chinese regime

Media outlet	*Accusation*	*Subject*	*Resolution*

BBC World	Airing reports considered by Chinese government to be offensive	Violation of human rights by Chinese regime	Dropped from Star TV satellite programming
HarperCollins	Considered to be unflattering to Chinese leaders	Criticism of Chinese regime	Cancelled the publication of a novel based on memoirs of Chris Patten (Hong Kong's former colonial governor)
HarperCollins		Flattering Chinese leaders	Published the biography of Deng Xiaoping, a most influential leader of the Communist Party in China

Table 8.3 Collaboration between Murdoch companies and China

Murdoch Companies	*Recipient (Chinese)*	*Action*
Fox News	China Central Television (CCTV)	• Created a news website for CCTV • Signed an agreement with CCTV to air each other's programs
News Corporation	*People's Daily*: The mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party	Launched a multimillion-dollar joint venture with the *People's Daily* to develop a website offering online news service
Phoenix	China	Offered China, due to a joint venture between Murdoch and Liu Changle, a global voice through an opportunity for more exposure on news and entertainment programs, which promised to reflect more of Chinese culture and tastes

Rupert Murdoch and his son James often criticize the Western media for continuously attacking China. James said the Western news media has unfairly portrayed China in a negative light. Rupert has showed hostility toward the Dalai Lama and was critical of Tibetan society under the rule of the Dalai Lama. In an interview with the American magazine *Vanity Fair*, Rupert says that the Dalai Lama is "a very political old monk shuffling around in Gucci shoes." When asked about Tibetan culture, Rupert claims, "It was a pretty terrible old autocratic society out of the Middle Ages… Maybe I'm falling for Chinese government propaganda, but it was an authoritarian, medieval society without any basic services."[33]

The media companies owned by News Corporation are less critical and more supportive of the

Chinese regime. News Corp is also less supportive of the Dalai Lama and critical of Taiwan and Tibet independence. In the *National Geographic* magazine and television channel, China has been often represented positively, and the issues of great sensitivity to China such as the Dalai Lama, Tibet, and Taiwan have been projected from the Chinese point of view. This was the case in the May 2008 issue of *National Geographic Magazine* that was dedicated entirely to China, and "the maps within portrayed Taiwan from China's POV—a POV in which they fantasize that Taiwan is now and has always been part of their authoritarian domain—instead of the independent (though unrecognized) nation that it is."[34]

For the last decade, Western media officials, such as Rupert Murdoch, have been doing favors for the Chinese regime in the hopes of gaining access to its market. Several of Murdoch's big projects failed in China, but he still considers China a profitable market and was proven right with *Avatar*. The movie, produced in 2010 by Fox Entertainment (a subsidiary of the News Corporation), made $200 million in the Chinese market. Murdoch said in his speech at the fourteenth Shanghai International Film Festival, "China's box office grows at an average rate of more than 40 percent every year. There is no more exciting film market in the world." Murdoch, according to an article published in *Shanghai Daily* in June 2011, "is eager for more future collaboration opportunities with local filmmakers to co-produce movies or bring Chinese pictures to the world."[35]

Murdoch is not the only Western media mogul who has been trying to win the Chinese leadership's friendship. "AOL Time Warner played a role in softening up the Chinese Communist leadership group. At a Hong Kong dinner in May, the media giant chief executive officer, Gerald Levin, introduced the Chinese president as 'my good friend Jiang Zemin,' and 'a man of honor, dedicated to the best interests of his people.'"[36]

Hollywood's cooperation with China in its goal of expanding its cultural power and influence has certainly aided the rising superpower. Good evidence of that is "one of the conditions for granting permission to AOL-Time Warner and News Corporation to broadcast into China was that they should support efforts by China Central Television to broadcast its English-language channel to the US, standing the globalization of liberalism thesis on its head somewhat."[37] Without the support of the Western media, the ability of China to have a cultural impact would be limited. While Western media moguls such as Murdoch at first aimed to challenge the authoritarian regimes by bringing the Western media to China, they have instead cooperated and fallen in line with the Chinese point of view.

Chinese cooperation with Western media centers could be a challenge to American power and influence in the future. Only time will tell if the current plan to leverage their huge market for influence will pay off in China; certainly News Corp and AOL have fallen in line. Hollywood's cooperation with China will make it difficult and even impossible for "Evil China" or "Free Tibet" to return to the American big screen. Hollywood's entrance to the Chinese market is conditioned by submitting to the Chinese rules. According to *Fortune* magazine, "the collaboration between China and Hollywood is not without its potential pitfalls. In year 2010 China sent a message to Hollywood filmmakers: if you cross us, we'll make life hard for you."[38]

Projecting China from a positive angle and, even from a more revolutionary perspective, as being the new protagonist facilitates Hollywood's entrance not only to the Chinese market but also to the global market according to the negative views many hold toward the United States. In the next section, we will detail how the *2012* movie marks a new beginning of China-Hollywood relations, where China is globally introduced by Hollywood as the savior of Tibet and the world. We will also discuss

how cross-cultural communication is achieved through the recent films *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Forbidden Kingdom*.

Hollywood and China: Cross-Cultural Communication and Beyond

China has been seeking for a long time to manage Hollywood so it can infiltrate the Chinese culture globally through its movies. China has been carefully observing American soft power, and it realizes that American cultural products and most notable Hollywood movies facilitate the acceptance of American culture, products, ideology, social norms, and political thought within different societies all over the world. China is now imitating the United States, and what is remarkable is that it is not doing so merely through its own film industry but through the American film industry as well. The United States has built up in the twentieth century Hollywood power and expanded it at a global level, and China has developed in the twenty-first century a well planned strategy to dominate over Hollywood and benefit from its established power. Two blockbuster movies worth considering are *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Forbidden Kingdom*.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon was directed by the Taiwanese-Chinese-American filmmaker Ang Lee and stars ethnic Chinese actors such as Chow Yun Fat, Michelle Yeoh, Zhang Ziyi, and Chang Chen. It is a multinational-multicultural Hollywood-Chinese-Hong Kong-Taiwanese coproduction released in 2000 and distributed by Sony Pictures. It was a major success at the domestic box office ($128 million) and the international box office ($85 million) with a total revenue around $213 million. *Crouching Tiger* became the highest-grossing foreign film ever in the United States, surpassing Roberto Benigni's 1997 *Life is Beautiful*. The movie was nominated ten times at the seventy-third Academy Awards and won four times, including Best Foreign Language Film, Best Art Direction, Best Original Score, and Best Cinematography. The film was also nominated for many other awards in the United States and abroad and won dozens of these awards.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon tells the story of a sword sent to Beijing to be preserved in one of the temples. The sword belongs to a Wudang master who decided to give it up after he failed to find the murderer of his old master and kill her. Once it is in Beijing, the sword is stolen and the quest to find and return it begins. The viewers find themselves in the middle of an adventure where the real protagonists and antagonists are women. The movie in its wider dimension revolves around the stories of three women. The first is about Yu Shu Lien, a businesswoman running the security enterprise her father left her. She is in love with a Taoist monk and Kung Fu master, Li Mu Bai, but cannot marry him since she must remain faithful to the memory of her fiancé that was killed. The second is about Jen Yu, the governor's daughter who is trying to escape an arranged marriage to find true love with a bandit leader she met accidentally during one of her family's trips outside Beijing. The third is about Jade Fox, who tries to achieve power and recognition using her body. She sleeps with a Kung Fu master to gain his knowledge; when that fails she kills him. The three women are of opposite spectrums: good, reckless, and corrupted. However, all have in common two major characteristics—their strong desire for freedom and quest to move beyond traditional gender roles.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon explores China, exposing its geographical characteristics, tourist sites, culture, artwork, architecture, costumes, customs, foods, eating habits, folklores, ceremonies,

and legends along with the daily life of aristocrats, monks, common people, and bandits. Throughout the movie, the viewers are exposed to breathtaking scenes of mountains, deserts, forests, rivers, and waterfalls. The architecture and design of monasteries, buildings, and other places hold significant artistic and historical values, while general shots of Beijing reflect the grandiose past of China. The viewers are introduced to the Cangyan Mountains and the Anji Bamboo Forest, which have helped tourism flourish in their respective locations.

The film is clearly Chinese, from the Mandarin language to the locations to the Taoist ethos; the Chinese themes are reinforced throughout. Repetition of key words such "Hans," "Han Dynasty," "Chin era," "Manchurian," and the word "Beijing"—repeated more than ten times in the movie—helps entrench the perspective. One of the most impressive scenes moving through the history of China and martial arts culture is a close-up shot of the Green Destiny Sword, along with the description given by Sir Te of the four-hundred-year-old sword:

Sir Ti (description of the sword): Two feet, nine inches long. One inch wide. The handle is 1 inch deep, 2.6 inches wide, 0.7 inches thick. With seven rubies missing from the hilt. You can tell the design dates back before the Chin era. Engraved with a technique lost by the time of Han Dynasty.

To call *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* a pure martial arts film is to betray the true nature of the film. It is not just a movie about fighting or power but one of beauty and perspective that uses martial arts to move the plot forward and also to convey a sense of what might be called a modern ballet. The true lesson is about human nature rather than effective fighting styles. The use of martial arts is both a convention of the time and an expression of movement beyond the typical duties and abilities of women.

In the film, we are introduced to China from the deeply spiritual aspect, starting with the title that "describes one facet of the Taoist way of life—the Taoist master will crouch like a tiger, in order to maintain the strength of a dragon."[39] From this starting point, every aspect of daily life in China is covered and the West is excluded: "By totally excluding the West from its narrative, this film has become a quintessential Orientalist fantasy."[40] Ang Lee explains his point of view by saying, "My team and I chose the most populist, if not popular, genre in film history—the Hong Kong martial arts film—to tell our story, and we used this pop genre almost as a kind of research instrument to explore the legacy of classical Chinese culture."

Approaching from a gendered perspective, we can see the progression that Hollywood has undertaken in a few decades. The China of *The Good Earth* is gone. In the past, the woman is introduced as a slave and her role in the society is indicated through a rigid and exaggerated representation of the Confucian doctrine of the three obediences. The same goes for the use of gender in the *Red Corner*, where the Chinese educated woman remains hopeless, voiceless, and subject to intellectual harassment until the end of the movie when she discovers the truth revealed by the Western businessman.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon reveals the opposite image of women as possessing the power to stand up to men and even to defeat them consistently. Throughout the movie, the audience is exposed to new images of a Chinese woman as a smart businesswoman, as a warrior with martial arts skills, self-confident, courageous, rebellious, and powerful enough to fight her own battles. The martial arts

fighting scenes show the inner, physical, and intellectual power of the three women protagonists; they are no longer pawns of men but fighters in their own right. Yet even this portrayal of gender includes negative elements such as the obedience of a Chinese woman for an arranged marriage or loyalty to a fiancé even after his death. Perspectives have changed, but negative Orientalist elements of the past still creep in.

Examining the movie according to cross-cultural studies that are based on the notions of collectivism versus individualism may give a wider dimension and better insight to the cultural factor that is the center of events. Negative representations of women in a collectivist society are dictated by cultural elements. The movie reveals a West-East struggle between collectivist and individualistic cultures. Fred Edmund Jandt writes, "In an individualist culture, the interest of the individual prevails over the interests of the group…In a collectivist culture, the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual."[41]

Within the Chinese society the collectivist culture prevails. This is the culture the movie stresses and tries to defend against extreme individualism. The real evil in the movie is Jade Fox, who is seeking freedom and equality with man by any means necessary. Jade Fox is nothing but the individualist that has succeeded in infiltrating the Chinese society to poison the mind of the youth. The conversation between Jen Yu and Shu Lien sets the framework of the woman's position in the Chinese society.

JEN YU: My parents are arranging everything. The Gous are a very powerful family. My marrying one will be good for my father's career.

SHU LIEN: You are fortunate to marry into such a noble family.

JEN YU: Am I? I wish I were like the heroes in the books I read. Like you and Li Mu Bai. I guess I am happy to be marrying. But to be free to live my own life, to choose whom I love, that is true happiness.

During the same conversation Shu Lien demonstrates the opposite, collectivist perspective with her loyalty to a dead man. Shu Lien cannot marry Mu Bai in order not to dishonor her fiancé's memory. Shu lien tells Jen, "I am not an aristocrat as you are…but I must still respect woman's duty."

Collectivism is embedded within Shu Lien's character, stressing loyalty, the importance of family, and welfare of the society. Shu Lien is an independent successful businesswoman and courageous fighter, yet she remains faithful to her collectivist culture. Shu Lien encourages Jen to accept her destiny, submit to her parents' decision and the arranged marriage, learn to be obedient, and respect hierarchy. She is also the one to interfere in a polite and sympathetic manner to settle the problem of the stolen sword without a direct confrontation. In collectivist societies, people value certain types of manners, such as "avoiding direct confrontation; giving great respect to others, especially elders and superiors; allowing others to 'save face' (appear to be right or respected); valuing politeness and humility; and viewing reciprocal favors as social necessities."[42]

In contrast, individualism is embedded in Jen Yu's character. Jen has been raised by Jade Fox, who advocates individualism, including its most evil aspects. She was for a time lost between the two cultures. After she flees home, she declares publicly her individualistic identity while engaged in a bloody fight at the tea house, causing its total destruction and serious wounds to the fighters who

challenge her. Jen's fight and disrespect to martial arts masters and to the Taoist monk represent her rebellion against the entire collectivist society and traditional gender roles.

The movie advances collectivism over individualism, overall, but it does support individualism in some instances, such as the changing role of women. While the evil individualist Jade Fox is destroyed, the positive individualism of Jen Yu remains. Her positive influence over Shu Lien convinces her to open herself up to her true feelings about Li Mu Bai. In this world, women can be powerful, beautiful, and dutiful at the same time. As long as they do not fall against traditional Taoist notions of good and evil, there are positive trains that individualist culture and women can bring to Chinese society. That a hybrid East-meets-West production such as *Crouching Dragon, Hidden Tiger* can engage these themes suggests that times have changed and, more important, gender perspectives have changed.

The Forbidden Kingdom

The Forbidden Kingdom, directed by Rob Minkoff and starring Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and Michael Angarano, is a Hollywood-Chinese coproduction movie: "*The Forbidden Kingdom* is an excellent example of a transnational cinematic production, with American company Casey Silver Productions and China's Huayi Brothers and the China Film Co-Production Corporation joining forces in this instance."[43] The movie tells the story of an American boy who gets in a fight with a gang in a generic Chinatown and, with the aid of a magical staff, falls from a balcony to find himself in ancient China, living a great adventure. The young boy possesses magical powers that, according to a Chinese myth about a monkey king, may save the world from the evil forces. In a journey through ancient China, the boy meets several allies who teach him the techniques of martial arts. Together, they become embroiled in a grand conflict between good and evil. They manage at the end to return the staff to the monkey king, and with his help defeat the evil forces.

The Forbidden Kingdom reflects the progressive nature of China in Hollywood cinema. It is a movie dealing with an existentialist theme of the everlasting fight between good and evil; however, the protagonists and antagonists have different identities than those the Western audience is familiar with. The combination of different cultures such as individualism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Kung Fu provides the heroes with the power to defeat the enemy. The perspective is no longer America versus evil, but now East meets West versus evil.

The innovation of the film is that it is wholly about and of China. It is in the Chinese territories that the major events and battles in the movie take place. The martial arts in the film symbolize the reacquisition of major cultural landmarks that are Chinese of nature: "According to legend, Bodhidharma who was involved in the propagation of Buddhism in China came to the famous Shaolin monastery. It is here—a monastery well-known for the translation of Buddhist scriptures—that kung fu took root. As with all legends, this one too points towards an important historical fact—in this case, the deep religious and cultural roots of this art form in the national imaginary."[44] Moreover, the movie represents China with its shots of the country, grand nature, and wildlife. The outdoor scenes bloom with the glorious history of China. The movie is rich with Chinese traditional elements from architecture to costumes. It is centered on Hollywood's version of a legend rooted in Chinese consciousness about immortals and a battle between demons and gods. The movie successfully introduces the monkey king—a creature well embedded in the Chinese mythology—to the world:

"The Monkey King is an impetuous, impish, impatient and adventurous creature who participates in the arduous journey to India over the Himalayas to bring to China the traditional sacred Buddhist texts. The Monkey King, filled with awesome powers, is able to break up deceptions. His defiance of established conventions represents the power to challenge those authorities reactionary and inhibiting to progress and advance of civilization."[45]

The movies still hold a few traits of traditional Orientalism: Chinatown is a dangerous city. Perspectives of certain individual characters in ancient China are backward. Yet at the end of the movie, the clear message is that China and the United States can help each other through mutual effort. The monkey king says to the boy, "You freed me, tiger, now go free yourself."[46] And it was with this wisdom and the Kung Fu culture that the boy brings from China that he manages to liberate himself and wins his own battles after returning home.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and *The Forbidden Kingdom* provide the framework through which we can observe the transformation of Chinese images in Hollywood movies and the importance these new images hold in establishing China as a powerful state. The two movies represent Hollywood's reversed version of *Seven Years in Tibet*, *Kundun*, and *Red Corner*. The movies also represent a reboot of American engagement with China after the errors of the past. Elements of both cultures are combined to produce a new view of what China has to offer the world. It is Hollywood-China's new equation of internationalizing China and the Chinese culture, in which Tibet's cause and Tibetan Buddhism has no place.

2012: A New Way of Doing Business

The movie *2012*, released in 2009, was directed by Roland Emmerich and stars John Cusack, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Amanda Peet, Oliver Platt, Thandie Newton, Danny Glover, and Woody Harrelson. This is another Emmerich-style apocalyptic movie that surpasses his two previous science fiction disaster movies, *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Independence Day*, in scope and spectacle. *2012* was a huge box office hit globally, making $769 million worldwide. More important, it is an example of the style of movie to come, acceptable to a global marketplace, but it diminishes the influence of the United States politically. *2012* has achieved a great success in the Chinese market and it is one of the very few foreign movies screened in China completely uncensored and uncut.

2012 is based on the Mayan prophecy stating that the world is going to end in 2012. The movie opens with the American geologist Adrian (Chiwetel) in a visit to a laboratory in India learning from Dr. Satnam Tsurutani, the astrophysicist in charge of the lab, that the temperature of the core of the earth is increasing very rapidly. Adrian reports the news to the White House, and the US government starts making plans to save as many people as possible to ensure the endurance of the human race; in two years, most of humanity will be doomed.

The US president and the leaders of the world start a secret project to build arks in Cho Ming, China, that may save 400,000 people. Funding for the project is raised by selling tickets for €1 billion per person. Jackson Curtis, a science fiction writer, knows about the secret plan and tries to save his family. To escape the disaster, he heads with his family to the arks. Almost every living thing on earth is destroyed by earthquakes and other natural catastrophes, yet Curtis and his family and hundreds of thousands of people make it to the arks built by the Chinese. The world is submerged under water except for Africa, where the mountains have risen above sea level, and those on the arks eventually

disembark to settle a new world.

2012 marks the beginning of a golden age between China and Hollywood, ending decades of Western cinematic frustration for China. The overall image of China is very bright and overcomes the stereotyping of Chinese characters that has persisted from past Western movies. The profits that filmmakers aim to make in the Chinese market results in movies such as this that overcome ethnocentrism to satisfy their new global audience and the regime that facilitates their expansion in the Chinese market. *2012* is a great celebration of the Chinese system that functions efficiently in the face of disaster and saves the human race from annihilation. Hollywood turns out to be the best opportunity for China to have a global voice in the twenty-first century, and *2012* proves it right:

> "Finally, an American blockbuster than acknowledges that America alone cannot save the world," was the response of many Chinese netizens. Many Chinese movie-goers watched with pride the scenes of Chinese troops escorting elite survivors onto the Chinese-made ark dazzled on the big screen. As Zhang Ying, an advertising executive in Beijing said, "I felt really proud to be Chinese as I was watching our (military) officers rescuing civilians in need." It seemed like a breakthrough that the Hollywood blockbuster conglomerate was finally willing and ready to portray the future world leader in a positive light.[47]

2012 suggests that China is the world leader in the twenty-first century, replacing the United States, which collapses under the disaster. While the United States and countries such as Japan, India, and Brazil were crumbling, US officials along with leaders from all over the world were heading to China, the last safe place on earth and where the Chinese-built arks ensured the endurance of the human race. The movie stands as a great celebration of China, not only by positioning it as the top leader of the new world, but also by envisaging a catastrophic destruction of China's most powerful enemies in the previous world order: "It is almost as if the People's Republic of China Propaganda commissars wrote the script for the movie. Their enemies, India, Japan, the hated USA and the Tibetans whose occupation causes the Maoists so much grief—are all destroyed. The Catholic Church whom they suppress and whose stated goal is to 'strangle the baby in the manger' is eradicated. The Chinese are seen as a can-do nation that saves the rest of mankind that depends on them for their survival."[48]

The movie is also a great, long-awaited revenge moment against Christianity for the Chinese. Western missionaries, to enlighten the pagan Chinese (as they see them) living in the darkness, have been interfering in Chinese internal affairs and collaborating with Western colonialists against China for centuries. *2012* eliminates China's old enemy and the everlasting threat to its regime by wiping out the Christian landmarks, such as the towering Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro and St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The latter's destruction was very dramatic and shocking: "A crack runs the length of the Sistine Chapel ceiling—directly between the adjacent fingers of God and Adam. Outside, a crowd of thousands keeps vigil in St. Peter's Square, holding candles, while the pope looks down from his balcony and a knot of cardinals prays within the basilica, until St. Peter's goes the way of all landmarks in a Roland Emmerich film."[49] *Christianity Today*, a magazine expressing the Christian perspective, shows discontent with Emmerich's annihilating Christianity, especially Catholicism: "If Emmerich is going to specifically show the Vatican leadership going down with St.

Peter's, I want to see Catholic (and/or Orthodox) bishops among the survivors—somewhere on the planet. The Church must continue, and while a Protestant with a Bible may be good to carry things on, Catholics need the succession of bishops. *2012* doesn't say that there aren't bishops among the survivors, but if Emmerich can kill 'em onscreen, he could have let some live onscreen."[50]

2012 indicates a breakup with Hollywood history as ideals such as messianism are no longer the ideological principles on which movies operate. For a long time Hollywood has attributed a religious zest to American foreign policy goals: "Through messianism, Hollywood has ascribed a particularly religious zeal to America's colonising, investment and redirecting of the world towards its own self-interested virtues…but there is also a theological treatment, reflected in the vibrant Christian and religious iconography that sees fictional and factual political heroes as saviours and Christ-like figures, not only of their own people but of the entire world."[51] In *2012*, the most important Christlike and American political figure, the president of the United States, is not the hero or the world savior but the one who is doomed with the rest of the American population.

The turning point in the Emmerich movie is the shift from the American to the Chinese perspective after the disaster hits. Even though the central protagonist is American, the perspective overall is not American in scope. For the first time in Hollywood history, the United States stands hopeless in front of the disaster and leaves it to the Chinese. While addressing the people of the United States, the president reveals the earth will be completely destroyed and the United States can do nothing to save it. The end of the United States is repeated over and over throughout the movie, visually and verbally. The more representative scene is of the hippie broadcaster, standing on the hill as if on the top of the world, shouting, "This marks the last day of the United States of America." This shot was followed with many destructive scenes of different places in the United States and with the US president claiming that he would be the last president of the United States.

Another type of destruction that the Western public is unfamiliar with is the defeat of US power. Near the end of the movie, one of the American passengers witnesses Air Force One crash into the water. The identity of the plane crashing in the water is verbally and clearly revealed by one of the professors declaring, "It is Air Force One." The presidential plane Air Force One has two major characteristics in relation to the US presidential image. First, it incarnates the power of American presidency. Second, it attributes a kind of godliness to the image of the US president. President John F. Kennedy was the first to recognize the importance of Air Force One in building the image of the US presidency:

> For years, the Air Force had identified the plane carrying the president by the call sign Air Force One. The code was kept secret for security reasons. Kennedy, however, thought the phrase had tremendous resonance and authorized his aides to start using it publicly. Presidential arrivals became media events, with the plane descending majestically from the sky and coming to a stop right before the assembled cameras of the waiting press. Kennedy would then emerge from the interior almost as a god descending from Mt. Olympus to dwell among the mortals. The technique has been used by every president since.[52]

The destruction is not limited to buildings, vehicles, and other materialistic forms, but it extends to military power, the political system, and the Western values. The US government denies to the public

what is happening and assassinates the people who try to go to the press to tell the public the truth. The US government restricts the freedom of press, long considered the essence of the American system. The hippie broadcasting character personifies the American media; he is hiding in the forest to safeguard the freedom of expression. He hides to tell the people the truth as the few who try to do so openly end up dead. The broadcaster is swallowed up by the expanding fire that breaks out in Wisconsin and covers the entire region. The moviegoers witness the end of the free media and the deterioration of the democratic political system of the United States.

2012 reflects the Chinese point of view regarding values and human rights. The movie is a strong cinematographic interpretation of the White Paper claiming that "the human rights to food, clothing, shelter, economic development, and security, as well as the right of individuals to live in a stable society, are paramount over traditional Western-style individual political liberties."[53] *2012* suggests that Chinese policy regarding human rights is the best; the movie shows that democracy, freedom, Western values, and religions are completely destroyed and prove to be incapable of saving humanity. *2012* is a reflection of the future of Hollywood in the new millennium since it displays the annihilation of Christianity and American culture. The movie sets the framework within which Hollywood would operate in the future. This framework is referenced in the American novelist's science fiction book at the end of the movie: "All we can hear is the sound of our own breathing. That reminds us we are still sharing our memories, hopes and ideas." Isn't this statement a reverberation of China's official slogan for 2008 Olympic Games "One World, One Dream"? Hollywood would no longer be Western-Fordism or Kung Fu-like, multicultural post-Fordism, but rather a Hollywood with no identity except that of humanity, which shares the memories, hopes, and thoughts of people all over the world, submits to a universal production mode, and belongs to the global market where a movie's protagonist would be the human being.

Hollywood's trend in the last decade concerning Tibet shifted from completely neglecting the issue to support of China's policy regarding Tibet. Tibet is treated as a province within China in *2012*. More important, in the movie, it is no longer China that destroys Tibet and its unique culture, but conversely it is China that prevents the annihilation of Tibetan civilization and Buddhist religion and contributes effectively in their endurance in the new world order. This is symbolized through the survival of the Tibetan family and one of its family members—a Buddhist monk; the family manages, along with the American family, to overcome great difficulties and get to the Chinese ark. The future of globalization and China is unknown; what is known is that Hollywood has now shifted from being an antagonist of China to fully supporting the country since it holds the key to economic markets otherwise untapped.

Reflection on Modern Orientalism

Orientalism refers to a particular Western view and analysis of the Asian region. Early forms of Oriental studies became what is now known as Asia studies or Asian regional perspectives. Said's version of Orientalism has endured since it seems to be a correct interpretation of the West's view of Asia as a backward, regressive, and primitive culture. Yet, as we have demonstrated in this chapter, Said's Orientalism is waning, and a new form of respectful Orientalism is rising. Movies such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *The Forbidden Kingdom*, and *2012* respect the Asian region and its people. No longer can one expect that representations of gender, class, or society reflect a view of

an inferior Asia. Due to the economic power of China and the rest of Asia, the world has taken notice and changed its views accordingly. This process will not be swift, but we can see the fruits of progress already.

Eastern economic success juxtaposed with Western economic weakness has led to a shift in the representation of the East. This new development opens Orientalism to a positive dimension and is more appropriate to modern West-East relations. Thus, under the new economic conditions, the West is moving toward a more open relationship with the East, causing the West to start studying, depicting, projecting, and imitating the East from an economic angle to produce more positive images of the region.

Taking the case of Hollywood and China, we can note that China has succeeded in retaking control over its image in Hollywood movies and has also been able to project its own political and cultural agenda. China managed to prevent Hollywood from producing old Orientalist movies about China. This new relationship of Chinese government dictating to Hollywood its political and cultural agenda started in the late 1990s and reached its peak in 2009 with the *2012* movie. This movie could be considered as a major turning point in the history of Hollywood and its engagement with Asia.

China and the East will no longer be studied or projected by the West according to the background, culture, education, political inclination, or experience of the Western image formulators (scholars, novelists, reporters, filmmakers). The replacement of the traditional image formulators by megamedia and big production companies whose main interest is making financial gains brought some radical changes to the process of filmmaking and also cultural viewpoints. China in the twenty-first century will be studied and projected in the West and by the West according to the Eastern perspective with respect to its identity, culture, politics, and ideology.

Negative Orientalism, in relation to powerful states in the East, such as China, is likely dead in the motion picture industry but will likely continue to endure in other aspects of Western culture untouched by global economic demands. A new perspective that emerges out of this chapter is the fact that Eastern views are now dominant. This perspective states that the East will teach, project, and formulate images of the East for the West. The Eastern image formulators will use the Western entertainment and media companies to disseminate the Asian views they create. The future of the movie industry is hybrid productions in the vein of *The Forbidden Kingdom*, *The Karate Kid,* 2012, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. These productions take Eastern views and package them for Western audiences. The open question is if Western audiences' interests in such movies will endure. Certainly we know that Hollywood itself has changed, but what of the consumers in the West? China has succeeded, as demonstrated in this study, to manage Hollywood. Will it succeed in using Hollywood to manage the West in the future?

Chapter 9
Conclusion

Hollywood, China, and Tibet: A Path Forward

Hollywood's portrayal of Tibet, China, and their protracted conflict serves as an important reminder of the major transformations taking place in the world at the political, economic, and cultural level. Through these issues we can predict, explain, and analyze the scope of world political interactions. Film tells us much more than the simple story presented in the trailer. By looking at what films are produced and watched, we can analyze and predict the atmosphere within global politics. As we have observed throughout this book, changes to the system and film industry in the twenty-first century are strongly related to two major factors: the dynamics of globalization and the rise of China. Issues define world politics, and these issues tell us about the pattern of interactions we can expect between Hollywood and China. For now, globalization and economics dominate over fears of a rising China, so cooperation, especially economically, is the dominate outcome.

The changes Hollywood is experiencing as the power of China grows and the global market expands mark the beginning of a new era of positive relations between Hollywood and China. The face of the film industry is changing, a change reflected in how Hollywood operates. There has been a remarkable transformation in perceptions from a Western Sinophobia with Fu Manchu movies and "Yellow Fever," to the simmering hatred between Hollywood and China in 1997, with the three critical films that were released (*Seven Years in Tibet*, *Kundun*, and *Red Corner*), to the release of *2012* in 2009 and the ascent of culturally sensitive projects that display positive images of China (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Forbidden Kingdom*). Tibet will no longer be the source of Hollywood activism because China does not want this issue on the agenda. It should be abundantly clear, right or wrong, that China can now effectively set the global agenda and no longer can Hollywood act on its own accord if it wishes to engage the global marketplace.

The three parties involved in the issues discussed in this book—China, Tibet, and Hollywood—are experiencing an identity crisis and witnessing the struggle between nationalism, cultural values, and globalization. The paradoxical situation of the three parties is that, to preserve their local identity, they need to operate on the global level and embrace different cultures, values, norms, and ideologies. China liberalized its economy and has learned how to effectively deal with the human rights demands from Western states through moderation and give and take. Hollywood has globalized its movie industry and no longer operates based on the tastes of the local US market. To survive and

thrive in this era, Hollywood looks to movies that move beyond the American perspective. Finally, Tibet "Westernized" its struggle and reached out to intellectuals and tastemakers to gather support for its cause. This movement was successful for a short time, but the clashes since 2008 have received little attention in the American press or media industry, suggesting this strategy is no longer paying off. To survive, Tibet will need to adapt to its current situation as an autonomous region of China once again.

China and Hollywood once had a destructive and conflicting relationship; now they are heading toward a more balanced and constructive relationship that serves best their economic interests and global growth strategies. Through the collaboration between Hollywood and China, Tibet might be able to find a way toward greater accommodation with China and manage to save itself from destruction by working with Hollywood. No longer can Tibetans expect Hollywood to side with them against China, but they can expect Hollywood's love for the mythical land to continue and could use this to share important aspects of their culture. The cinematographic power of Hollywood could be productively used to pave the way toward innovative resolution strategies that may assist in the process of Sino-Tibetan reconciliation and continue the positive Sino-US relationship.

Findings on the Theoretical Perspectives: A Framework to Anticipate the Future

Overall, we find great support for the issue-based approach to world politics. Issues are at the heart of interactions, even in the realm of culture and media. What factors are important to the actors involved, the timing, and location of each contentious issue dictates the course of interactions. At first, human rights concerns were the primary issue of focus between the United States and China, but this issue area shifted toward economic matters in the mid-2000s as the rise of China became a reality. The economic potential, not military might, of China is really the factor that shifted the balance toward a more fruitful relationship between China and the West. The West seems to only respect cultures and institutions that operate with a similar ethos. Now that China is shifting towards a capitalist model like many others, the West is keen to engage the culture on a more nuanced and equal level.

In contrast, we find little support for Orientalist views after the 1990s. Orientalism was the dominant perspective before the year 2000, but things changed in light of the greater concern for diversity, different viewpoints, and general education. Presumptions about China no longer have a prime place in any form of cultural communication. Before, it was the norm that Chinese characters were evil and bloodthirsty, that the armies were faceless hordes bent on destruction, and that views of women were contemptuous at best. Now communication is much more enlightened, fair, and progressive. While the West may still be learning about the Asia region, it at least seems to engage the culture with some form of respect.

Our initial expectations have been confirmed. Orientalism is useful in explaining past engagements with China, but it no longer can help explain the dynamics with which peoples and states engage the East. Instead, the East is engaged just like any other region due to its economic and political power, perhaps now at an equal level with Europe. These forms of power were absent in relations before but now take the forefront. The story of the fractured relationship between the parties in examination can

be uncovered and analyzed based on the issues under contention. The new perspective emerging out of this study based on the case of China and Hollywood is the reverse of Said's Orientalism. This perspective states that, considering the rising of China as a global power and the effective strategy China is applying to diffuse its views in the world, there is a possibility in the future that the West will study, teach, perceive, project, and formulate images of the East in a positive and fair manner. China would use Chinese and Western entertainment, media, and business companies to disseminate its view of the Orient within the Western societies for the purpose of cooperating with the West at first, possibly later dominating the region. This perspective has to be developed further in the light of new research, observations, statistics, and data.

As for our study of Hollywood's effectiveness in altering the course of the Sino-Tibetan conflict and observing Hollywood's role through the lens of media powerful effects theories such as agenda setting and cognitive dissonance, we conclude that Hollywood succeeded in the formulation of a strong, positive, Western public opinion toward Tibet, the Dalai Lama, and Tibetan Buddhism but did not bring any significant changes in the US policy toward China. The study shows that Hollywood celebrities, production companies, and various movies failed to achieve the agenda they built according to the Dalai Lama's strategy to push the United States and the international community to exert pressure on China regarding the human rights and Tibet issue. Hollywood's efforts to jeopardize China's global growth strategy and its newly developed, healthy relationship with the Western governments were ultimately fruitless. China, since the 1990s, has been witnessing tremendous economic growth and attracting investors from all over the world while its relationship with the United States and Britain has been growing stronger. China was granted permanent MFN status in 2000 and officially became, due to the support of the US government, a member of the WTO on December 11, 2001. In the meantime, China has continued to deal with Tibet in a ruthless manner, with waves of attacks and protests continuing from 2008 to the time of this book's publication.

Hollywood, China, and Tibet: A Fractured Relationship

Throughout its history, Hollywood has created and perpetuated negative images of China and the Asians in general, stimulating the West's imagination in a destructive direction. Most Hollywood movies in the twentieth century focus on some of the most upsetting periods of Chinese history, such as the Mongolian invasion, the decadence of the Chinese dynasties, and Red China under the leadership of Chairman Mao. Of the hundreds of Hollywood movies about China and the Chinese, only very few present the positive aspects of one of the richest and oldest civilizations in the world. Even positive movies such as *The Good Earth* continue to perpetuate the myths and fallacies the West likes to see in Asia; *Flowers of War* is the same in its negative views of the Japanese.

In relation to Tibet, Hollywood has constructed captivating images of the region that have stimulated the Western imagination for decades. Capra's *Lost Horizon* perpetuated the myth of a magical utopian kingdom inhabited by a peaceful society that aims to preserve the wisdom of the universe. In 1993, Tibet was revived in Hollywood with the movie *Little Buddha*, which follows the Tibetan monks in their search for a reincarnated High Lama. The Westerners have been strongly motivated by the spirituality of the Buddhist monks based, as the movie illustrates, on a few simple rules "to feel compassion for all beings, to give of oneself, to pass on knowledge like the Buddha." Likely this is due to the contradictions in Western life where the pursuit of materialistic goals for

stability does not truly satisfy the soul.

Hollywood movies in general approach Tibet from a positive perspective, focusing on the myths and spiritual dimensions that make Tibet so fascinating while ignoring the historical and political-administrative Tibet that might have painted a more realistic portrait of the region. Most Hollywood movies disregard, during the rule of the Lamas, the deficiencies in the Tibetan social, political, and economic system.

Hollywood's attention was drawn to the Sino-Tibetan conflict in the 1990s because of what Tibet stands for in the minds of the creative industry. The Dalai Lama has been successful in gathering attention and support through his message of humble spirituality. Hollywood's portrayal of China and Tibet is shaped by religious, cultural, ideological, and political factors. On one hand, Hollywood's portrayal of Tibet has been influenced by the popularity of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, the expansion of the Theosophy society, the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the Western world, and the position of revolutionary Tibet as an enemy of Communist China. On the other hand, Hollywood's representation of China has been affected by its past experience with racist projections, such as the era of the Yellow Peril and the rise of a state that has at times been hostile to the United States. In modern times, China has been a threat to the United States due to its sporadic political alliance with the Soviet Union, its remarkable economic growth in the 1990s and 2000s, its colonial impulses in certain regions, and its system of repression in the areas of human rights, intellectual freedom, and outright violent subjugation of opposition forces. These problems have dominated perceptions of China.

Hollywood activists allied with Tibet through the works and activities conducted by celebrities such as Richard Gere, Martin Scorsese, Jean Jacques Annaud, Steven Seagal, Harrison Ford, Sharon Stone, and Adam Yuach of the Beastie Boys. The Free Tibet movement reached its peak in 1997 with the production of three movies—*Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner*. Hollywood production companies and activists were a tremendous force used in the process of internationalizing the Sino-Tibetan conflict; hundreds of millions of people in the United States and worldwide have heard the celebrities protest against the occupation of Tibet, have seen the three 1997 pro-Tibet movies, and have become aware of the issue when they otherwise would have remained ignorant.

Moreover, Hollywood is a reflector and stimulator of the American public and a major force in the formation of its opinion by its ability to frame issues. Hollywood adopted the Tibet cause in the 1990s and thus accelerated dramatically the wave set off modestly in the late 1970s dealing with Tibet, its spiritual, and political leader—the Dalai Lama—its religion, culture, and most importantly, its struggle for freedom. Hollywood and the film industry were able to stimulate the international community's hostility toward China by triggering global awareness of Tibet's struggle for freedom. Because of this force, a process of issue linkage was initiated where geopolitical issues between the United States and China became connected to the Tibet issue.

The Hollywood movies concerning the Sino-Tibetan conflict were released at a crucial time. China was trying to effectively integrate Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Tibet into the mainland to ensure political stability and economic progress. Without unification of its disparate parts, China could not be seen as a great power. Instead it was limited in its ability to control external forces, thus degrading perceptions of its power. Unification of its territories was a paramount goal, as the regime was rising to geopolitical prominence. At the same time, the Dalai Lama was making inroads in his efforts to internationalize Tibet's struggle.

Kundun, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner* were viewed by the Chinese authorities as a great

challenge to their perspective. The films could have become damaging to China's image locally and globally. The movies are considered provocative for several reasons. First, the three films imagine the Communist regime at its worst under Mao. These movies paint the regime as dangerous, controlling, and disrespectful of individual rights. Second, *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet* strongly reinforce the destructive image of China by suggesting there was widespread oppression by the PRC government against Tibet. Finally, *Red Corner* overstates the negative aspects of the Chinese law while oversimplifying the legal process and also suggesting brainwashing is a typical technique used by the Chinese government.

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* were viewed by the Dalai Lama and some Tibetans as a powerful communication tool that could be used to defend their cause; the movies' promises were very high for stirring up universal support of Tibet that could contribute to ending the suffering of the Tibetans and bring back peace and sovereignty to their country. Who would not want their story to be told with grand production values and by famous actors and directors?

The power of the two movies is in the skillful use of the cinematographic language and content to convey a political message. The Hollywood films orchestrate their message according to the Dalai Lama's political strategy of internationalizing Tibet's struggle for freedom. China's war against Tibet is represented as a war against humanity and the goodness of mankind. The message is clear, China equals evil, and Tibet is equivalent to all that is good about this world. The filmmakers pull the conflict between China and Tibet out of its real context to give it a universal meaning extending beyond the limit of time and place. Tibet symbolizes more than just a location; it symbolizes the "global good."

Kundun and *Seven Years in Tibet* are two very powerful pro-Tibet propaganda movies, as they provide a strong sense of reality; both are of the autobiographical-historic genre and use a historical narration that stresses the idea of Tibet as a free independent nation that was invaded by hostile Communist troops. They draw attention to the position of China as conqueror and Tibet as an occupied nation. Both movies also seek to glorify the Dalai Lama, considered by the Chinese regime as the first and most dangerous enemy. Both movies portray the fourteenth Dalai Lama as a god/king and a divine being embodying absolute love, peace, and wisdom. They represent the Dalai Lama as the spiritual and political leader of Tibet, declaring him as the head of the Tibetan government and the only one authorized to speak on the behalf of Tibet and the Tibetans. However, the two movies are one-sided, as they represent the conflict between China and Tibet from the point of view of the Dalai Lama and its Western supporters while completely ignoring the Chinese point of view and even disregarding facts. Both movies provide false impressions about the status of Tibet as an independent nation, which contradicts with the fact that Tibet is, according to international conventions, an autonomous region of China. The United Nations, along with governments all around the world, recognizes Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.

The Hollywood campaign to support Tibet reached its peak in the late 1990s. The connection to fears and anger directed toward China as it was growing stronger cannot be disconnected from the process. Most Americans saw in China their new most powerful enemy after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and even they were concerned about the eruption of war between the United States and China. At the same time, the American government eventually saw China as a vast, untapped economic marketplace and rushed to get its share of the market. Hollywood, through its celebrities and movies, tried to convey its discontent regarding the American government's engagement with

China. This perspective did not last long, as the best of moral intentions quickly collapsed in the face of cold, hard economic reality.

Moreover, Hollywood's engagement in the Tibet situation had devastating consequences upon the American film industry's economic agenda. The release of *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Red Corner*, along with the pro-Tibet activities and work of Hollywood celebrities, erupted into a major crisis between Hollywood and China just as President Clinton was pushing a new open-door policy. The PRC government put a ban on the studios that produced the three movies (including Disney) and the people engaged in their making. The ban also reached most celebrities engaged in the Free Tibet campaign. Martin Scorsese, Richard Gere, Melissa Mathison, and others were banned from entering China, and some for life. Despite all intense efforts, the ban over Disney products was not lifted until February 1999. By the end of 2000, the three Hollywood companies had their ban rescinded.

China's ban on Hollywood production companies made them revise and rethink their priorities. Some believe the idea of Hollywood is to be the source of high art, politics, and culture, but the events of 1997 have made it abundantly clear that the economic market and entertainment is the main priority of the film system. Since 1997, Hollywood made thousands of films, yet none of them dared to challenge China's perspectives or even to mention the Tibetan struggle for self-determination. The findings of this study provide further evidence on who will win the ultimate battle, yet Tibet still has much to offer the world from the cultural standpoint.

Hollywood, China, and Tibet: A Promising Future

Examining Hollywood's involvement in Tibet's struggles from a wider dimension may lead to a different understanding of its contribution in altering international events. Despite the strong criticisms about Hollywood's involvement in the Tibetan cause and the debate raised about its effects, Hollywood succeeded in becoming a powerful force in the international debate. The film industry itself became an actor involved in the diplomatic process.

Hollywood, China, and Tibet are experiencing some major transformations that may affect their relationships with each other and how each interacts with the world. Since the 1960s, the international community has shown great concern about the situation in Tibet. However, the United Nations and other Western actors did not succeed in promoting a better situation in Tibet. At the very least, Hollywood's engagement in the Tibet struggle contributed in internationalizing the struggle and making it part of the central issues on the table between the West and China.

Hollywood movies and celebrities in the twentieth century brought about some negative consequences, intensifying the tensions between China and Hollywood on one side, and China and Tibet on the other. However, there is hope for the future relationship between Hollywood and China. Now relations are better than ever. Few films would dare challenge the Chinese marketplace and instead bend to Chinese perspective like *2012* did. Films like *The Karate Kid, Flowers of War, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and *The Forbidden Kingdom*, represent the future. Relations between China and Tibet, on the other hand, have grown more tense and dangerous. The only difference now is that Hollywood and the Western media are uninterested in serving as a witness to the struggle.

China and Tibet need to reengage and rethink how they interact. Looking at the relationship between Hollywood, China, and Tibet from a mutually interdependent perspective might lead to

benefits for all involved. Hollywood can help China expand and grow with a human face, no longer insinuating evil intentions on the Chinese; China could allow Hollywood to expand into new markets as it searches for new profits after the fall of the home video market in the Internet era; Tibet could be able to expand its culture and views in a benevolent way free from revolutionary intent. The only goal in this case for Tibet is survival and the expansion of culture.

This view requires some changes among the actors involved. Hollywood needs to operate in a different manner than its typical ethnocentric Western views. China needs to respect the human rights perspectives of the West and guarantee Tibetan freedoms. Tibet needs to give up its dream of independence or complete autonomy and accept that the best situation it can hope for is some form of benign relationship with China where China grants cultural independence in exchange for political integration. This revolution in thinking about goals holds the promising potential in enhancing tolerance and understanding among nations and states through the lens of culture.

This process has already begun with major transformations in Hollywood's political and cultural agenda toward China and Tibet. *2012* represents China as the world's savior and Tibet as a region under Chinese sovereignty. It is a major turning point in the history of Hollywood's engagement of Asia. China is no longer the evil power in Hollywood movies; it is now the "good." Tibet is no longer a conquered nation suffering from Chinese occupation, but it is a part of China, and Tibetans are united with the motherland living in harmony with their surroundings.

Hollywood's Virtual Tibet: A Precious Gift to China

There has been a consistent representation of Tibet in the Western media. In this book we have demonstrated the typical construct, which includes the status of Tibet in Hollywood movies as a mythical and utopian land, the real life Shangri-La. Hollywood views Tibet through the lenses of myth, magic, and mysticism. It tends to avoid reality, preferring an exaggerated fantasy to the underbelly of a land so revered.

Tibet is located in the heart of one of the most secluded locations on earth. It is the home of many breathtaking views and 18 nature reserves. Westerners are very familiar with this image of Tibet, one that is well represented through movies. But there is negligence on Hollywood's part because of the portrayal of the feudal and backward Tibet in films. There is very little coverage of the lack of personal freedoms in the area or conflicts between the monastic factions. No one tends to show the agrarian culture that is so primitive in relation to modern standards of living. Even the domination of the Buddhist point of view is ignored in favor of the traits people find fascinating with Buddhism, such as their belief in reincarnation, the end of suffering, and the Dalai Lama as a representation of Buddha.

Tibet does have a unique culture as revealed through the Tibetan's simple life, a life centered on spiritual matters. Tibetan Buddhism is popular in the West for its emphasis on kindness, peace, and a centered life. Spiritual enlightenment is a universal goal for most people who belong to a religion and believe in God or any other divine form. The idea of spiritual enlightenment is symbolized by Tibet, and this has a significant impact on how people perceive Tibet, its intentions, and future. Due to the status of religion in the West, Tibetan perspectives have been widely spread throughout the Western world. While this trend might continue in an era of global depression and cross-cultural communication, China may also begin to have a larger stake in the global dialogue.

No one can fault Hollywood, the West, and moviegoers in particular for falling in love with Tibet. Its beauty is unequaled. It remains mostly cut off from the modern world but also a symbol of compassion and love at a time when many people are having internal debates about the course of human life. The Dalai Lama is clearly a great, charismatic, and pious figure worthy of devotion. He is the symbol of compassion and dharma in an age of materialism. His perspective has dominated films, documentaries, music, and literature; but what of the future? What can we expect once he is gone? It is likely that the global economic market will determine how we view Tibet in the future, thus increasing the probability that the image of Tibet as part of China will emerge strongly within the Western society.

Hollywood long ago created out of Tibet the myth of a land where Buddhism and Tibetan culture reign supreme. It imagined a Tibet that was a mythical land where poverty, savagery, hostility, disease, feudalism, and serfdom do not exist. Instead we are left with a bright image of Tibet where love, peace, modesty, joy, and spirituality prevail. In some ways, it can be said that Hollywood has liberated Tibet from China by globally circulating the idea of Tibet as a utopia with a unique culture. Thus Hollywood established Tibet as a free peace zone in the minds and memories of people in the West. What Hollywood created out of Tibet goes much beyond the geographic place, with a certain regime and governmental instruments. It is a virtual place that exists in the world consciousness. In the changing landscape, Hollywood could play a major role in liberating Tibet from Western fantasies and bringing real Tibetan Buddhism to virtual Tibet. China could play a significant role by implementing a revolutionary socioeconomic plan, bringing virtual Tibet—a place of divine beauty, free of conflicts and materialistic constraints, where love and happiness prevail—to real Tibet and at the same time expanding its soft power through the use of the new Tibet as a symbol of a different and more accommodating China.

China started the twenty-first century with two global events—the 2008 Olympic Games, with its theme “One World, One Dream,” and the Shanghai World Expo of 2010, with its theme “Better City, Better Life.” These events reinforced its status as a major player in the global economy and commercial affairs while providing a deeper dimension to its role in promoting understanding, peace, and tolerance among the people of the world. Similar events and Chinese movies, along with Chinese/Hollywood coproductions, reinforce China’s soft power. What could be a more powerful symbol of China’s soft power strategy than a peaceful resolution of the Sino-Tibetan conflict leading to a new China emerging as a protector and enhancer of world peace?

The first sign of China’s willingness to develop a healthy relationship with Tibet is the great flexibility the Chinese regime now displays in possibly allowing the return of the Dalai Lama to Lhasa. China’s top Tibetan official, Padma Choling, told reporters in May 2011, “If the Dalai Lama wants to come back, the door to China is always open. If the Dalai Lama really does retire as he says he has, if he stops his separatist activities, stops disrupting the stability of Tibet and really concentrates on Buddhism, then this will be good for Tibet. The key is if he really gives up Tibetan independence.” While this talk may sound unrealistic at this time due to the revolutionary activities of some Tibetans, there is hope for the future, a future that includes the Dalai Lama in Tibet.

It is also in Tibet’s interests to find a solution to this protracted conflict with China. The Dalai Lama should be allowed to return to Tibet and China to claim his rightful place as the leader of Tibetan civilization. Tibet’s future is tied to the ability of the Dalai Lama to be a universal symbol and to provide outreach for Tibetan culture; but he is also the leader of Tibet, and this can only come

from having a perch in Tibet.

A possible resolution to the conflict could be envisaged if the two cross-cutting goals are met; China retains Tibet as a territory and protectorate, but China should also allow for Tibet to have special privileges in terms of religion, beliefs, and perspective. The model some envision is the Vatican model where Vatican City retains its culture, privileges, and independence outside of Italy's formal governmental structures. While this model might be hard to implement—considering the form of the Chinese political system—it can provide a framework and an example for future negotiations. To move toward this view, China has to allow for more religious representation in daily life.

If China were to allow Tibet to retain its special privileges as a religious and cultural center of China, China could move toward solving the soft power gap in the global system. As it is, China is at the mercy of other great powers in terms of soft power. The cultural power today remains in the West with capitalism, Disneyland, Hollywood, and above all the Catholic Church (centered in Vatican with more than one billion followers). A more balanced portrayal of global culture might include Chinese perspectives as well as coverage of Tibetan Buddhism. As we have outlined, the Tibetan Buddhist perspective is very appealing to millions of people in the West who feel a certain amount of emptiness in their daily lives. Perhaps China and Tibet can work hand in hand to advance a more nuanced perspective that includes Chinese views along with Tibetan practices.

China, Tibet, and Hollywood may play a role in concretizing the idea of Tibet as a spiritual city in a Vatican model. The Dalai Lama's return to Tibet is possible after he officially gave up his role as the political leader and head of the Tibetan government-in-exile in May 2011 and turned over his powers to the prime minister in exile. A joint effort between Hollywood ("the dream factory"), China ("the global economic power"), and Tibet ("the sacred land of Buddhism") may bring peace, stability, and prosperity to Tibet and China. On the other hand, Hollywood's involvement in the Chinese film market and as an image formulator of a positive perspective of Chinese and Tibetan harmony allows it to potentially become a center of cross-cultural communication. Hopefully the three parties can work together to put forth a more cooperative agenda for the future. The same battles cannot be fought over and over again. Hollywood cannot continue to mythologize Tibet without respecting China's perspective. China cannot demean, attack, and bully Tibetans if it wishes to be accepted by the West. Finally, Tibet does not have the power or the ability to fight China for independence. Its only hope is cultural independence and to work hand in hand with China to put forth its perspective for the world. It is in the global self-interest to preserve Tibet's unique culture, spirituality, and goals.

China and Hollywood have a higher duty towards humanity; they should seriously consider working together to promote the idea of Tibet as a spiritual and cultural sanctuary preserved for the world. This sanctuary, if promoted effectively by Hollywood, can draw millions of visitors every year who will be interested in visiting a utopia. But we must stress there are no real-world utopias. There is only the reality with which each actor can work with. Peace and understanding can only come by working with the constraints evident in the global economic and diplomatic system. Hopefully these constraints can help save Tibet instead of destroying it. Only time will tell what the future holds, but most would agree that this future should include Tibet and the ideas of dharma, spiritual enlightenment, and cultural harmony.

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